Valley Voice

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Public Hearing December 10 on CEMEX Permit

Catherine Doe

On Wednesday, December 10, the Tulare County Planning Commission will hold a public hearing concerning CEMEX' conditional use permit at Stillwell mine in Lemon Cove. CEMEX is a Mexican-owned gravel mining company that has been accused of violating its permits since taking over RMC Pacific Materials in the early 2000s. Everyone concerned with the future of Tulare County is encouraged to attend.

At stake is not just CEMEX' mining permit at Stillwell, but any future mining permit the multi-national might seek. At this time, the Tulare County Planning Commission will only be making a decision concerning the Stillwell mine. But how CEMEX comports itself in view of the violations of their conditional use permit, and how willing the company is to fairly compensate the four residents for their property's loss in value, will determine if Tulare County residents will ever allow CEMEX to operate in this county again.

According to the Resource Management Agency (RMA), the following actions may be taken by the Tulare County Planning Commission at the conclusion of the hearing: the planning commission might revoke or modify CEMEX' permit # 98-003 for possible violations of the permit conditions; the commission may also recommend litigation against CEMEX, or impose fines and penalties in relation to the damage done to the Stillwell mine's neighbors; or the planning commission may find that CEMEX is not in violation of its permit and recommend that no action be taken.

Because of the serious nature of the violations, the public hearing might be continued for an additional day to discuss issues that may come up in the first hearing and to guarantee that everyone has their say. After the possible second meeting, the Planning Commission will make a decision and present it to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors. The board of supervisors will then vote on the commission's recommendation. If the effected parties do not agree with the final decision they can make an appeal.

Not yet on the table are CEMEX' violations of its conditional use permit at the Lemon Cove facility. Several residents' wells next to the Lemon Cove facility have dropped in elevation by half, and the neighboring farmers have not been able to irrigate their citrus groves. A separate public hearing will be proposed to negotiate compensation for these Tulare County residents.

A week before the public hearing was formally announced, a representative from CEMEX called Rob Morton, one of the neighbors of the Stillwell mine whose well went dry. The CEMEX representative said that he had arranged a conference room in Three Rivers and wanted to present either a proposal or legal document to the residents. The representative told Morton he had two days to organize the four affected residents for the meeting. Morton politely declined.

Earlier in the year, the four homeowners living next to Stillwell mine did meet with a CEMEX lawyer in the chambers of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors. The lawyer had a contract ready to go and encouraged the residents to sign on the dotted line. The legally binding agreement would have waived the residents' right to sue CEMEX in exchange for $20,000 to go for a new community well. Seeing as a community well would have cost around $120,000, and would have been an organizational nightmare, the residents politely declined CEMEX' generous offer. Sometime in 2015, CEMEX will be

HEARING continued on **11 »**

B.A. Norrgard (left) with prospective tiny house owners.

Lemon Cove Village, Where Smaller is Better

Steve Pastis

Lemon Cove Village, which bills itself as a "tiny house community," is making the argument that smaller is better, at least when it comes to houses. The property, located on a former KOA Campground at 32075 Sierra Drive in Lemon Cove, is scheduled to open to its first residents on January 1.

"We got rid of the dead trees, fixed the building and redid the bathrooms and the showers," said Dirk Dole, the owner of Lemon Cove Village. "We're trying to make it a tiny house community – that's the goal," he added, explaining why the property is not looking to accommodate recreational vehicles.

Lemon Cove Village, which is licensed for 55 homes, is apparently a groundbreaking venture.

"It's one of the first tiny house communities in the country, maybe even the first," said B.A. Norrgard, who runs the website aBedOverMyHead.com where she shares information and her enthusiasm about tiny houses. "There may be five or six houses on a property somewhere, but this could be the first tiny house community."

There are currently no tiny houses on the property, but Norrgard arrived with her house to show to the small but interested group in attendance on the first evening of a three-day open house.

Norrgard is a consultant for Lemon Cove Village, one of the projects she has undertaken since leaving her legal career. "I loved my legal career," she explained. "It was great, but the legal world is changing. It was time to walk away from it."

She likes her new life and enjoys the opportunities and benefits of owning a tiny house. "I don't have rent; I don't have mortgages; I don't have property taxes," she said, adding that she likes being mobile. "My plan is to travel and teach."

Norrgard conducts tiny house workshops, which cover the options for a tiny

TINY HOUSES continued on **10 »**

Mathis Welcomes Office... and Twins

December 1st was not your average day for Tulare County's new Assembly member, Devon Mathis. That morning he was in Sacramento getting ready for the swearing-in ceremony when he received news that his wife was in labor. Members of the California Senate and the California Assembly took the oath of office on Monday at noon, and Assemblyman-elect Mathis rushed back to Fresno to be with his wife and newborn twins, a boy and a girl. Mom, Dad and their new baby girl were resting at Fresno Regional Hospital while the baby boy was getting some special attention at Valley Childrens' Hospital.

Mathis recently beat out Rudy Mendoza for California State Assembly District 26. He was among the 80 members of the Assembly who were sworn-in to office during ceremonies at the Capitol, and was one of 27 in the freshman class. December 1st marked the first day of the state legislature's 2015-2016 session.

VUSD Board to Vote on Censure of Board Member Charles Ulmschneider

Steve Pastis

The Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) Board of Directors will consider a resolution to publically censure Board Member Charles Ulmschneider for violating the Brown Act in his efforts to get the board to add a third language option for students, with his preference being German. The resolution to censure is expected to be on the agenda of the December 9 board meeting.

Charles Ulmschneider

"Our board president directed me to get together a resolution to publically censure Board Member Ulmschneider for Violating the Brown Act," said Craig Wheaton, VUSD Superintendant. "I'm going to put it on the agenda because they're going to need to discuss it. I'm working with legal counsel to make sure that whatever they do stands up.

"This isn't about someone who disagrees with an issue, because we often disagree," he added. "This is about how we do business and making sure we do it at a public meeting.

"I'm sure that other board members would agree that German would be a great language to offer," continued Wheaton. "The concern we have is he's calling other board members, meeting with other board members and doing it in a systematic way to distribute information to all the board members. They've never seen a board member do this. If a board member is struggling with a topic, they may call another board member. That's legal

CENSURE continued on **11 »**

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

Where's Brian Wilson When You Need Him?

Apart from the simmering exasperation--nay, rage--nothing that has emerged from Ferguson, Missouri in the four months since Michael Brown's shooting death has made any sense to me. Everything--from the events themselves and the characters of the primary actors to the reactions both of protesters and police--has been nuanced by dualism: Michael Brown was a thug, caught on camera robbing a convenience store--but also a promising young student, the first of his family set to attend university; Brown was shot charging officer Darren Wilson--but also, as some have said, with his hands up, clearly unarmed, pleading with Wilson not to shoot. This has left Ferguson with rioting (or not) protesters and brutality (or not) by its police department. It depends upon one's point of view, and how far one is able to extend his sympathy towards the truth--whatever that elusive quantity is.

And now the St. Louis County Grand Jury has declined to recommend that Wilson be placed under any degree of indictment for what amounts to many as murder. As presented--and as expected--the evidence made sense: There was an initial struggle for the gun inside the police car, with Brown reaching in, and there was--immediately afterward--a pursuit, with Wilson giving chase on foot. In this scenario, the forensics seemingly exonerate Wilson. And while the grand jury investigation was largely able to debunk the "hands up, don't shoot" quote of Brown's purported final moments--which inspired the protesters' rallying cry--still, I am puzzled by more than a few things. Why was Brown's body left neglected, uncovered for some four and a half hours after the shooting--and is this indicative of a callous police attitude toward the citizenry of Ferguson? Why was no eye batted at the prospect of Wilson's having washed evidentiary blood off his person before speaking with investigators? Why was the true distance between Brown and Wilson not accurately determined for the moment when the fatal shot was fired?

Then there's this: Of the 12 shots fired by Wilson, Brown was struck six times, once fatally. Was Wilson a member of the Ferguson Police Department or the Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight? Were Brown's wounds chiefly inflicted as he was fleeing and, most tellingly, had he really turned and--if accidentally--presented himself head down to Wilson when the killing bullet was fired? This is how the grand jury saw it--which means not only that a Ferguson Police Officer couldn't shoot worth a damn but, perhaps, that he was inadequately trained to do so. When one intends to kill, one aims for a head, thoracic or abdominal shot, right? But what if one intends only to stop an escaping suspect, or drop a charging one to the ground? The last distance between Brown and Wilson is key here. Or is it somehow against police protocol across this country to instruct prospective officers in accurately shooting the legs from beneath people? Brown sustained no gunshot wound to either leg.

But I level no accusation, and take no position other than to state the oddity of the incident. Odd in its circumstance, that is, and its dualism; not, sadly, even remotely odd in the all too frequent reoccurrence of this egregious tragedy. On Thanksgiving, my wife baked a perfect pumpkin pie; perfect, that is, except for her omission of sugar. So while what we had looked quite the pie, it tasted more like pate--and, though egregious, naturally enough was neither. This is what we have in Ferguson: I don't see a murder, but neither do I see very good police or even investigative work. I see yet another young Black life truncated by the gunfire of a White police officer in Anytown, USA. And it's unacceptable. It has always been unacceptable, but maybe now--at long last--we can make some progress in this regard.

Because Brown neither deserved nor needed to be killed--which is just the first, and most simple, of two glaring truths to emerge from a case that has been a morass of uncertainty. What has become almost embarrassingly obvious is that police officers across the country need to be outfitted with some kind of body camera.

To begin with, the police would comport themselves with a higher degree of professionalism if held to an accountability both immediate and easily viewed. Having footage of police activity would help protect not only officers, but the public; moreover, such video--an official document, as opposed to something sketchily captured on someone's phone cam--could provide telling details at trial. In an era when the police are ridiculously over-equipped, this one tiny piece of technology might--despite body armor, automatic weapons and assault vehicles--be the key component in making the streets of every neighborhood much more secure. We have long accustomed ourselves to the ubiquitous security camera, but the time has now come in this country for every patrolling police officer--individually--to wear one.

Wouldn't it be something if, in having the "talk" with their children, Black parents could--like the rest of us--limit the conversation to the business of the birds and bees? That topic itself can be difficult enough to grapple with. Wouldn't it be something if young Black people did not also have to be taught that they might--almost casually, sometimes--be killed by the police? Wouldn't it be nice?

— Joseph Oldenbourg

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Political Fix

Catherine Doe

It's Their Party and They'll Cry if They Want To

On November 4, Democrats won every statewide office and the majority of California's Senate and Assembly. So why aren't they doing some congratulatory high fives?

Well, for a few reasons. For the first time in 20 years, Republicans defeated three Democratic incumbents in the California State Assembly, putting an end, for now, to the Democratic supermajority. Nationally, Democrats did even worse. They have so far lost at least 14 seats in the House of Representatives, and have lost control of the Senate for the first time since 2006.

So is the California GOP changing to appeal to our more progressive state?

There are almost as many Republican women as there are Democratic women in the Assembly. This is true even though Democrats account for just under two-thirds of the members. (For those who are math challenged, that means that percentage-wise there are fewer Democratic women than Republican women in the state assembly.) A GOP victory in the liberal Bay Area produced the biggest surprise of the election. Catherine Baker, an attorney from Pleasanton, won a state assembly seat in the East Bay, becoming the most prominent Republican official for hundreds of miles. Republicans have been without any state or federally elected officials in the Bay Area since 2006.

Wagging fingers replaced high fives as the Democratic post mortem continues. Low voter turnout accounted for several narrow Republican victories. According to the *SF Chronicle*, "the pundits who predicted a lousy turnout for California's Nov. 4 election got it wrong. It was way worse than that. With almost every vote counted across the state, it appears about 42% of the state's 17.8 million registered voters cast ballots. That shatters the previous low of 50.5% set in 2002."

Much of the blame for Democrats' low turnout is being put on Gov. Brown's shoulders. They blame Gov. Brown for not bothering to spend more time and money on the campaign trail revving up the base. They are also kicking themselves for not spending more money to knock off Neel Kashkari. Tim Donnally so galvanized Hispanic voters because of his anti-immigration lifestyle and policies, that just having his name on the ballot could have easily doubled the number of Hispanic voters.

Gov. Brown was going to win no matter whose name was on the ballot, and he didn't care about winning a Democratic supermajority. His team said that they chose not to take the low road and campaign for Mr. Donnally. Or maybe they just weren't organized enough and didn't care enough to do so.

Top Two

In 2010, Proposition 14 was passed to usher in more a moderate legislature and end the gridlock in Sacramento and Washington.

Did it work?

Both Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin and Woodlake Mayor Rudy Mendoza came in a commanding first in their races in the June primary. Whereas everyone knew that Ms. Swearengin had no chance on the state level of winning for Controller, shock waves rippled through the area when Mr. Mendoza lost his election to an unknown for state assembly.

During debates and on the campaign trail, Mr. Mendoza took very partisan positions. He made it clear that because Republicans did not have a majority in Sacramento he would make it a priority to get Republicans elected. On the other hand, Assemblyman-elect Devon Mathis' motto was "People before Politics." He prioritized the message that he would work across the aisle to get things done.

Obviously the Democrats chose the more moderate of the two Republicans. Mr. Mendoza didn't receive much more than the 40% he received in the primary. Mr. Mathis ended up getting all those who voted for him in the primary plus many of the Democrats who had no one else for whom to vote.

Throughout California there were 25 similar races where the top two hailed from the same political party. I don't know how those races turned out, but the open primary system worked as it was designed in Assembly District 26.

Propositions--2016

Yes, we already know what will be on the 2016 ballot. Those propositions that did not qualify for the 2014 primary or general election can still lurk in the shadows, waiting to be resurrected. So be ready for the "six states" initiative sometime in the future. For now, here are the most likely to appear during the next presidential election.

One proposition that has already garnered a lot of attention and controversy is being spearheaded by the Family First Foundation. The foundation wants to legislate how often a married couple has sex per week – with each other that is.

Just kidding. The propositions can make the mind wander so pay attention.

An initiative on plastic bags is almost certain. Thrilling right? Well, there are some very angry people, including my mom, at Gov. Brown for signing a bill banning plastic bags in pharmacies, grocery and convenience stores. The plastic bag industry is pretty mad also. A South Carolina plastic bag company plans on spending millions of dollars convincing Californians that they need to continue filling our oceans with trash and killing our wildlife. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Davis, San Jose and Long Beach have all banned plastic bags--so many Californians have already gotten used to the idea. Someone should tell the plastic bag industry to make the mental adjustment as well.

If the plastic bag industry can get enough signatures before the December 29 deadline, it would get nearly a two-year hold on the ban. Even if they lose, it's still a good investment for big profits to be had.

A Proposition to legalize pot in California came within a cat's whisker of getting on the November 4 ballot. The proposition was registered with the California Secretary of State but fell just short of signatures. Last year, during its last month of eligibility, a strategic decision was made to put the proposition on the 2016 presidential election ballot.

If the proposition passes, the measure will allow Californians to possess, purchase and use less than an ounce of marijuana. Individuals could also grow up to six plants for personal use. The proposition will establish a 25% tax on marijuana sales to be distributed in support of education, drug and alcohol treatment, local government, law enforcement and environmental restoration for damage already done by illegal pot growing.

Ironically, California was the first state to legalize medical marijuana in 1996, but will be the last west coast state to legalize pot for general consumption. Oregon, Washington and Alaska have all legalized it, along with Colorado and Washington, D.C. By the way, Alaska is the first Red state to legalize pot, and this happened during a non-presidential election that draws more conservative and older voters. Watch out Kansas!

Now for taxes. According to Dan Walters of the *Fresno Bee*, "It's virtually certain that California voters will be asked in 2016 to extend – perhaps permanently – the temporary increases in sales and income taxes that they approved in 2012."

Proposition 30 was sold to voters as a temporary tax to fund education and is set to expire in 2018. Newly re-elected Superintendent of Schools Tom Torlakson has many Democrats lined up with him to push for the tax extension to be put on the 2016 ballot, possibly making them permanent.

The Legislative Analyst's Office just came out saying that with the steadily improving economy the taxes won't be missed once they expire. Even if the Democrats had a supermajority and forced a tax extension through both houses, Gov. Brown would have vetoed it. When Gov. Brown campaigned for Proposition 30 he made it clear that it was a temporary measure and he is sticking to it.

Election Fun Facts

Now that the election is certified, and all ballots counted, it's time for Election Fun Facts!

Nationally, the House GOP has its largest class since the Hoover administration after knocking off many more House Democrats than expected. Not in California, though! Congressional Republicans had a chance to win nine Democratic-held House seats and blew every one of them, three being right here in the Central Valley. Many want to blame House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who could have used the drought as political leverage, you know--the Democrats-love-fish-more-than-people-and-that-is-why-your-well-is-dry issue. While the nation turned Red, Democrats actually ended up increasing their California House delegation by one seat.

Governor Jerry Brown put up quite a fight to beat Meg Whitman four years ago and for his efforts he received 5.4 million votes. This election he won by a landslide but received less votes, 4.4 million. How did he receive less votes winning by a landslide and why should we care? Low voter turnout is how that happened. We should care because the number of signatures needed to qualify an initiative for the ballot is based on the total number of votes cast for governor. To place a statute on the ballot, signatures equal to 5% of the votes for governor are needed.

Congratulations are in order for Porterville's Felipe Martinez, who finally won his first election after three losses. In 2010, he lost the Porterville City Council race as an incumbent, coming in fifth. He lost the city council race again in 2012, and then lost the June primary for Supervisor District 5. But on November 4, he won a seat on the District 5 Porterville School Board by 12 votes.

Zombies aren't just on the television hit show "The Walking Dead." They are roaming the halls of Congress. Defeated or retiring lawmakers are the newest zombies and have former Senator and Tea Party darling Jim DeMint worried. He considers these politically undead legislators loose cannons. The Fresno Bee described his feelings as "instead of being beholden to voters, they could go rogue and actually vote their conscience." Gasp!

Remember that boring tidbit I wrote about in my last Political Fix that "legislative" propositions are put on the ballot by the legislature, and "initiatives" are put on the ballot by people like you and me? Well, the pass rate for legislative measures is 71%, much higher than the pass rate for initiatives put on the ballot by the public, which is only 38%. Hmmmm.

In the last 50 years, the most likely person to win the presidency is a governor or vice president; that is, not a legislator--but rather someone with management experience. So the real contenders for president in 2016 will be Chris Christie, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker or Bobby Jindal. The one exception in the last 50 years? Senator Barack Obama.

And Finally…

Most Californians support Obama's latest executive order to keep families together. So it must grate on our Golden State's nerves to hear intelligent people call it amnesty. What is the rest of the country thinking?

Now, I've met someone this year who I'm convinced did not experience live birth but was actually hatched--and unless you are one of those people, what is the problem with letting parents of American-born children stay in the country? Not only do they pay taxes, but they clean hotel rooms they could never afford to stay in themselves. Not only do states' economies grow faster with large immigrant populations than those without a large, cheap, reliable workforce--they work their asses off for our benefit.

President Reagan's amnesty bill of 1986 gave illegal immigrants a path to citizenship. President Obama's executive order doesn't give them a path to citizenship or anything else. They do not get to skip to the front of the line. They don't get a green card. They do not get a temporary work visa. They don't get health benefits. They don't get welfare. They don't get food stamps. They don't get to vote. They get nothing but maybe a peaceful night's sleep for the next two years. Even the anti-immigrant hatchlings can see that maybe after a good night's sleep they can work even harder for the same pitiful salary.

Visalia Chamber Raises Awareness of Proposed Sign Ordinance

Steve Pastis

The City of Visalia is updating its 36-year-old sign ordinance. The proposed changes include new restrictions on a variety of signage.

"The city council directed that the sign ordinance be updated," said Josh McDonnell, AICP assistant director and city planner for the City of Visalia. "It has been a topic of discussion for two or three years. The sign ordinance hasn't been updated since 1978, so the city council felt it was high time to look at regulations that reflect the city's current vision."

McDonnell was asked if the proposed changes would make it more difficult to do business in the city. "I think the business community will probably agree with that statement and a portion of the residents of the City of Visalia would disagree," he said.

To get input from businesses, as well as residents, the Planning Department and Sign Ordinance Committee will hold meetings at City Hall East at 3pm on both December 4 (for downtown retail signage) and December 18 (temporary signage).

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce has been hosting its own meetings to make sure that businesses are aware of the proposed changes. The next meetings are set for December 9 at 7:30am at the chamber office, 220 N. Santa Fe; and December 17 at 4pm at the Buckman-Mitchell office, 500 N. Santa Fe.

"Most businesses don't like ordinances because people want to run their business free from outside rules," said Gail Zurek, Visalia Chamber CEO. "'If I want to cover my windows with my product, it should be my right to do it,' but most businesses understand there are standards we need to create.

"From my vantage point, I'm not sure that most businesses are aware that changes are being made," she said. "There are new additions to the sign ordinance that affect businesses – electronic signage, mobile signage, temporary signs – and window signage is also included."

Zurek said that a business on Main Street that currently has a giant iPod that enables potential homebuyers to search for a house would be in violation of the proposed ordinance changes.

The proposed sign ordinance would mean major changes for many city businesses.

"When the sign ordinance was created, no one considered electronic signs," she said. "It wasn't a viable option for most businesses. There's a thought from those in planning that they want to avoid one-upsmanship and creating a Vegas mentality."

Under the new ordinance, banners and anyone standing on the sidewalk to advertise a business, such as the six-foot crow often seen on Mooney Boulevard, would be illegal, according to Zurek. "And if you advertise an event, there will be a time period that those signs can be out."

Wrapping your car with your business information would be legal, but hiring someone to wrap their car with your business information would be illegal. Another type of sign that will be restricted under the proposed ordinance is the "snipe sign," one which is attached to a tree, post or fence.

"The window signs is the big one," said Zurek. "That is the one people are concerned about. Seventy-five percent of the window should be transparent. This includes Christmas and holidays. Twenty percent is for window signs on a single window. Temporary signage includes a poster for a charity event."

Indoor signs within two feet of the window are also included in the 20%. "If you start adding two feet from every window, there's not a lot of space to display," commented Zurek, who noted, "Originally, it was going to be 10%. We got them to bring it up to 20%.

Membership logos, including chamber logos, are exempt, as are credit card logos and flags.

A 45-day limit on how many days a year holiday decorations (the total for all holidays) can be on commercial – or private property – is also in the proposal, according to Zurek. "They're looking at amending that," she said. "At the last meeting, we were saying, 'You've got to be kidding me.'"

Political signs aren't facing restrictions, according to Zurek. "You can't control political signs because that's controlled by the Federal Election Committee," she said. "The ordinance has to be in accordance with what's written elsewhere."

"Visalia is probably right in the middle with its sign ordinance," said McDonnell. Some cities have no problem with the use of billboards. Other cities prohibit a lot of signage. Some are in between."

The Planning Department and Sign Ordinance Committee is still gathering input and the proposal is being carefully studied. "The technical advisory committee is literally going through the ordinance page-by-page," said McDonnell. "No stone is being left unturned.

"We hope to have a draft final resolution before the planning commission in January," he said, adding that the commission will then take the resolution to the Visalia City Council for a vote. "It might take one (planning commission) meeting or it might take five."

Meanwhile, meetings are still being held and arguments are still being put forth.

"In my opinion, advocating for businesses is far more effective early in the process," said Zurek. "We will advocate at every level and every turn. Everyone wants to create a good ordinance and for us to do that we have to be engaged early – and we are."

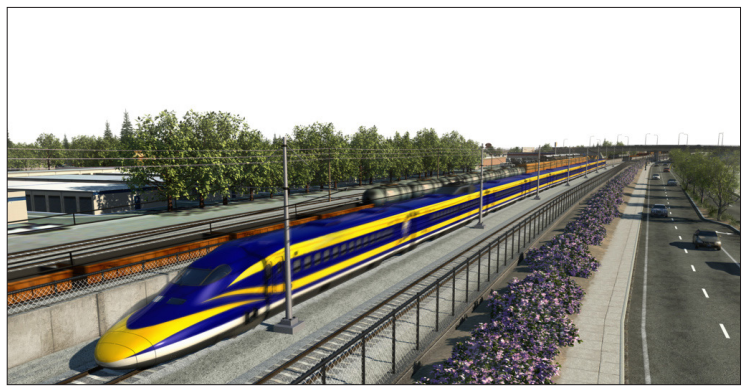
High-Speed Rail Authority Issues Request for Qualifications

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) has issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for design-build services for Construction Package 4 (CP 4), representing the next 30-mile phase of construction through the counties of Tulare and Kern and the cities of Wasco and Shafter.

"The Authority continues to deliver on its voter-mandated mission to build high-speed rail in California that will connect the major regions of the state through the ever-growing population centers in the Central Valley," said Jeff Morales, CEO of the Authority. "As we have already seen with the ongoing construction work in the Central Valley, high-speed rail is creating jobs, small business opportunities and benefitting the local economies."

Firms will have until January 30, 2015 to submit their statement of qualifications. The Authority will then review these applications and establish a shortlist of the most highly qualified firms to provide design-build services for the project. Firms will be selected based on experience, technical competency, ability to perform and other factors. The qualified firms will then be eligible to submit formal design-build proposals in 2015. Work on CP 4 will extend approximately 30-miles through the Central Valley, beginning one mile north of the Tulare/Kern County line to Galpin Street north of Bakersfield. The estimated $700-to-$900 million design-build contract will bring jobs to the Central Valley, an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in California and the nation.

The route will also provide environmental benefits, relieve roadway congestion and spur economic development. A design-build contract means the chosen contractor must develop innovative means and methods to design the project and then construct it. This approach can lead to faster construction as the contractor is accountable for timing of design and construction work. The selected design-build firm will be responsible for all work required to design and construct the CP 4 segment in the Central Valley. The work will include construction of at-grade and aerial sections of the alignment and the relocation of 4.6 miles of existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks. This phase of construction received state and federal environmental clearances earlier this year.



The Authority is committed to small businesses playing a role in delivering the high-speed rail program. The design-build contract will include the Authority's adopted 30% goal for small business participation in the work.

The Authority is hosting an Industry Forum on December 5, 2014, at Bakersfield College, Forum West/101, 1801 Panorama Dr., Bakersfield, from 9am to noon. This event allows interested firms to network and learn about the details and requirements of the contract, how to bid and the importance of small business participation.

The RFQ is posted online available from the Authority's website at www.hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Construction/design_build_construction_contracts.html. All applicant questions regarding the RFQ must be submitted via www.bidsync.com.

To learn more, visit www.hsr.ca.gov or facebook.com/CaliforniaHighSpeedRail, or call (916) 324-1541.

CalChamber, Coalition Fight Expanding Federal Say on Water, Land Use

The California Chamber of Commerce has joined with 375 trade associations and chambers from 50 states to voice strong concerns with a proposal that will have a huge impact on ordinary business activities by dramatically expanding federal authority over water and land uses across the country.

The coalition, including associations representing a wide range of industries, has called for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to withdraw the proposed rule and start over on drafting it.

By redefining what constitutes "waters of the United States" governed by the federal Clean Water Act, the proposed rule could expand federal jurisdiction over waters from 3.5 million river and stream miles to well over 8 million river and stream miles, according to maps prepared by EPA.

The proposal also would likely result in more stringent storm water management requirements, which would affect retailers, companies with large parking lots, "big box" stores, etc.

In comments submitted November 12, the groups state, "The proposed rule is really about the agencies' overreaching attempt to replace longstanding state and local control of land uses near water with centralized federal control. In light of the overwhelming evidence that the proposed rule would have a devastating impact on businesses, states and local governments without any real benefit to water quality, the agencies should immediately withdraw the waters of the U.S. proposal and begin again. The current proposed rule is simply too procedurally and legally flawed to repair."

Examples of the proposed rule's impacts, as cited in the groups' comments, include:

- The rule would make most ditches into "tributaries." Routine maintenance activities in ditches and on-site ponds and impoundments could trigger permits that can cost $100,000 or more;
- These permitting requirements would likely trigger additional environmental reviews that would add years to the completion time for ordinary projects;
- Even if a project can get a permit, firms often will have to agree to mitigate environmental "damage" with costly restoration/mitigation projects.

Given the lack of a court order or court-issued deadline to revise the proposed rule, the agencies involved have enough time to redraft it, working with federal, state and local authorities to develop consensus-based changes that protect waters, encourage economic prosperity, and are legally defensible.

Self-Help Enterprises Recognized as NeighborWorks Green Organization

Staff Reports

Self-Help Enterprises, based in Visalia, has been recognized as a NeighborWorks Green Organization for its comprehensive commitment to sustainable operations. To achieve this designation, Self-Help Enterprises was required to demonstrate adherence to a set of green business practices across its operations and all of its program areas.

This is the third consecutive year that NeighborWorks America has recognized member organizations for their efforts to create healthier, energy-efficient environments for homeowners, renters, community residents and employees. To date, 61 NeighborWorks organizations have achieved this designation.

Self-Help Enterprises, which works together with low-income families to build and sustain healthy homes and communities, is committed to green practices – both in the field and in the office. Self-Help Enterprises constructs self-help homes of modest size that reduce land use, builds eco-friendly playgrounds, and integrates Energy Star appliances and solar panels across homes and apartment complexes. In the office, Self-Help Enterprises has diverted much of its waste from landfills by including recycling bins rather than trash cans in staff work spaces, identifying recycling and composting bins in the employee break room, and changing printer settings to default to double-sided printing. The organization also makes bicycles available to staff to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote physical activity.

"We are honored to be named a NeighborWorks Green Organization for our commitment to sustainable building practices and our green office culture", said Tom Collishaw, CEO of Self-Help Enterprises. "The green strategies we have adopted save families money, improve health outcomes and reduce our environmental impact."

NeighborWorks America, which creates opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities, supports a network of more than 240 nonprofits in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"Self-Help Enterprises is helping individuals and families become healthier with an improved quality of life," said NeighborWorks America Acting CEO Chuck Wehrwein.

The NeighborWorks Green Organization designation is significant because it challenges organizations to be comprehensive in their efforts to be green. Through the organizations' participation in this program, 4,200 employees are experiencing a healthier, greener working environment. Last year, the organizations educated more than 9,500 households on the core elements of healthy and sustainable homes.

The green ethos is integrated into every aspect of Self-Help Enterprises' development. Not only are all homes and apartment complexes built to California's stringent CALGreen energy code (Title 24), but most of the homes exceed it. For example, Rancho Lindo Apartments in Lamont is Build It Green certified, exceeds Title 24 by 37%, and includes large solar energy systems, reflective cool roofs, low-water landscaping, tankless water heaters and many other energy upgrades. The Goshen Village II rental community and recently completed Viscaya Gardens rental community in Dinuba also exceed Title 24, and like Rancho Lindo, are Build It Green certified and include many of the same efficient upgrades that are now standard practice for Self-Help Enterprises' multifamily rental homes.

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Edison Invests $25,000 in COS' STEM Scholarship Program

Staff Reports

Edison International presented the College of the Sequoias with a $25,000 investment in the STEM Scholarship Program. STEM stands for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields of study offered by the COS. Graduates from these fields are often recruited for employment opportunities within Edison International. COS students continuing at COS or transferring to four-year college and majoring in one of these fields of study are the intended recipients of this annual scholarship. The awards, ranging from $1,000 to $4,000 per student, will be announced in May of 2015.

"Edison International continues to be a leader in the local business community when it comes to making investments in the Central Valley's future labor force," said Tim Foster, COS Foundation director. "These scholarships have allowed students not only to continue their studies, but also expanded their choices of where they earn their degree."

"We at Edison International are impressed with the caliber of COS students studying STEM courses and pursuing related careers" said Bill DeLain, Southern California Edison region manager, local public affairs. "I keep in touch with past scholarship recipients and am excited about their passion for science and commitment to advanced study."

The COS Foundation facilitates over $370,000 a year in scholarships to incoming, continuing and transferring COS students from the local area.

The COS Foundation is an independent nonprofit organization led by volunteer community members within the COS District that are supportive of COS and its positive impact on students and their communities. Foundation volunteers and staff cultivate and direct community resources to COS in the areas that matter most to the communities for which COS serves. Primarily through direct gifts, special events and planned giving, these raised resources are invested or immediately spent for the direct benefit of COS students and programs. Some recent uses include student scholarships, educational equipment purchases, and capital improvements.

Gifts to the Foundation assist COS in providing quality education at an affordable cost, ensuring that College of the Sequoias will continue to graduate well trained, competent men and women who will take their places in the business, industry and service occupations of the San Joaquin Valley. Donations can be given in a number of ways: cash, stock, real property, deferred gifts, memorials, matching gifts, scholarships and in-kind donations.

For more information about the COS Foundation, visit www.COS.edu/foundation or call 730-3861.

Scott Bailey, Cal Water district manager, with Jessica Cavale of the Visalia Rescue Mission, Cal Water Acting Customer Service Manager Renée Burton, and Lindsay Baldwin of the Visalia Rescue Mission

Cal Water Partners with Local Organizations to Brighten Holidays for Needy

Staff Reports

As part of its continuing effort to improve the quality of life in the communities it serves, California Water Service Company (Cal Water) presented contributions of $2,500 to the Visalia Rescue Mission, the Wounded Warriors Project and the Visalia Emergency Aid Council, through the company's "Operation Gobble" program to help make the Holiday season better for those in need.

According to Cal Water District Manager Scott Bailey, Operation Gobble donations do not come from water rates, but from the company's shareholders.

"Cal Water is committed to being a good corporate citizen and improving the quality of life in our community," Bailey said. "Through Operation Gobble, our shareholders hope to make the Holidays a little brighter for our residents."

The Visalia Rescue Mission provides lodging and meals to the homeless, the Wounded Warrior Project assists wounded veterans during their recovery and transition back into civilian life, and the Visalia Emergency Aid Council provides food, clothing and transportation to those in need.

Cal Water serves about 132,200 people through 41,200 service connections in Visalia. The company has provided water service in the area since 1927. Additional information is at www.calwater.com.

Sequoia Shuttle's 8th Season Attracts Record Ridership

Despite operating the fewest days of the past eight seasons, some milestones were set during the 2014 season of the Sequoia Shuttle.

A new reservation system for the Gateway shuttle was launched, which allows visitors from other countries, out-of-state passengers and out-of-the-county California residents to make their reservations in advance. The Gateway shuttle ridership showed an all-time-high ridership per day, during the shortest year of service to date.

Visalia Transit partnered with the National Parks System to secure a Kids to Trees Grant to provide the opportunity to transport about 1,700 school-aged children in Tulare, Kings and Fresno Counties to engage in outdoor exercise. The help from the grant covered the cost of transportation for groups of six or more via the Sequoia Shuttle. The Shuttle transported over 200 students, and about 1,500 seats will be available through this program during the 2015 season.

The Sequoia Shuttle service available over the Holidays is only for the internal shuttle service. This is the free shuttle service within the park, no reservations necessary. Service runs within the park from 9am to 4pm from December 26 to January 4.

The shuttle service booked through SequoiaShuttle.com is for the external service, and that only runs from Memorial Day through approximately, Labor Day.

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Tickets are also available on Facebook (exetercourthousegallery&museum), by email (courthousegallery@mail.com), online at exeterhistoricalmuseum.com, or by phone at 679-2474.

This fundraiser supports the continuation of Exeter's nonprofit community art gallery and museum - as well as scholarships and continuing heritage education including local Native American culture - and is supported by a wholly volunteer staff.

MANY THANKS FOR THE CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE CITY OF EXETER

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Kaweah Delta Pharmacy Team (left to right), back row: Clint Brown Pharm.D, Richard Poirier B.S, Pharm.D., James McNulty Pharm.D.; front row: Rheta Sandoval Pharm.D., Yleana Garcia Pharm.D., BCPS, and Nicole Gann Pharm.D.

Kaweah Delta Pharmacy Team Wins National Best Practice Award

Staff Reports

Kaweah Delta Medical Center has been named one of six recipients of the 2014 American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP) Best Practice Award for a new approach to pain management for hospital patients.

Kaweah Delta Pharmacy staff will accept this national award the second week of December during an event in Anaheim. It will be the second award this year that the team has received for Kaweah Delta's Pharmacy Pain Management Service, a new approach to pain management that began approximately nine months ago at Kaweah Delta. It will also be the second time Kaweah Delta's pharmacy team has received national recognition for innovative best practices in pharmacy.

"This was a strategy that truly has helped improve patient care at Kaweah Delta," said Dr. James McNulty, Pharm.D., pharmacy director of Kaweah Delta Health Care District. "We have a great pharmacy team whose members are all top-notch, at the top of their licensure and committed to patient care."

Kaweah Delta's Pharmacy Pain Management Service was developed by clinical pain pharmacists Dr. Clint Brown, Pharm.D.; Dr. Yleana Garcia, Pharm.D, Board Certified Pharmacotherapy Specialist; and Richard Poirier, Pharm.D.; in collaboration with medical staff and under the direction of pharmacy management including Dr. James McNulty, Pharm.D; Pharmacy Director; Dr. Rheta Sandoval, Pharm.D., Inpatient Pharmacy Manager; and Dr. Nicole Gann, Pharm.D., Clinical Coordinator.

To date, the program has:

- Resulted in 1,335 interventions to improve or optimize pain management for patients.
- Increased patient satisfaction scores for pain management to their highest level since 2008.
- Resulted in a 59% reduction in pain medication side effects.
- Reduced the use of high-risk medications on patients.
- Saved the district an estimated $1.6 million.

Through this new service, the team is available seven days a week to make recommendations to care providers about which medications should be given to patients to manage their pain. The team then reviews all medication orders placed by providers to determine if the medications ordered could cause a patient to suffer side effects. If that is the case, the team speaks with nursing/physician staff to mitigate potential risks by making recommendations to improve patient pain control and satisfaction.

Public Meeting for Greenway Trail Project Set for December 9 at Golden West High School

A public outreach meeting to discuss the Southern California Edison Greenway Trail project is set for 5:30pm Tuesday, December 9, at Golden West High School, Portable #24, 1717 N. McAuliff St. in Visalia.

The meeting will inform residents, particularly those who have property adjacent to or in close proximity of the proposed trail, from just north of the Rector Station to its connection with the St. John's River Trail. The meeting will cover what is being planned in the design of the trail, the requirements of Southern California Edison, proposed amenities, and the timeframe of the improvements.

Design team members attending the meeting will include representatives from SCE, Brian Thorburn, regional manager/local public affairs; Matt Ainley and Craig Hartman of 4Creeks Engineering; and Kay Hutmacher of Sierra Designs Inc. City of Visalia Project Manager Vaughn Melcher will facilitate the discussion.

The trail is about three miles long, and will be an important North-South trail connecting several trail systems in the city. It also will connect to the future Eastside Regional Park facility at the northeast corner of Highway 198 and Road 148. The estimated cost of construction is $3 million.

Use the parking area at the southeast corner of the Golden West High School campus for easy access to Portable #24. For more information, contact Melcher at vaughn.melcher@ci.visalia.ca.us.

Community Generosity and Partnerships Drive Annual Event

Staff Reports

Tulare County businesses, agencies and community partners have been collecting toys for the annual Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Friends of Tulare County Toy Drive. Over 1,500 children and youth in child protective services can expect to feel included during the Holidays as they receive gifts because of community generosity.

Community residents are asked to help "Brighten a Child's Winter Sky" by participating in the annual Tulare County CWS and Friends of Tulare County Toy Drive. Though foster and group homes provide basic necessities like clothing and food for these children, it is difficult to stretch that funding to include anything extra special. Your contribution can help ensure that these children and youth do not go without a gift this Holidays.

"The efforts of Tulare County employees and the generous donations from the community are appreciated and welcomed by the children and youth who are not able to be at home during the Holiday season," said John A. Mauro, L.C.S.W., division manager of CWS.

Making a donation is as easy as dropping off a new and unwrapped gift for a child or youth at one of the many collection boxes volunteers have already set out at community sites. You can also log on to www.friendsoftularecounty.org, where instructions are available to help you choose a child, print a star, and learn about the gifts that are on the child's "wish list," then attach that star to the unwrapped gift(s) and drop it off at one of the many collection sites throughout the county.

Contributions are accepted through Friday, December 5. Gifts will be distributed through the week of December 8. Community members who wish to make a financial contribution can do so through Friends of Tulare County by mailing checks to 5957 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia, CA 93277, Attn: Brooke Sisk. Please write "CWS Toy Drive" in the memo line.

More information can be found by logging on to www.tchhsa.org and clicking on the "Spotlight" tab, or by logging on to www.friendsoftularecounty.org and clicking on the "CWS Toy Drive" tab. This annual event is made possible by collaborative partners including: CWS, Friends of Tulare County, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, Pirates for Hope, Bikers United for Kids, and many others.

Visalia Chamber eLearning Center Offers On-Demand Training

Staff Reports

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce has announced its new eLearning Center powered by Global Classroom. The Visalia Chamber eLearning Center provides a total education solution for building technology, business and career-ready communities. The solution includes over a thousand online courses and trainings, providing access to quality online training across multiple digital devices.

"Business owners want their employees have high quality training options and new learning opportunities," said Chamber CEO Gail Zurek. "The creation of the eLearning Center will allow employers to select courses they want employees to complete and track employee progress. Additionally, the Visalia Chamber eLearning Center allows the flexibility to complete courses at a convenient time and location for both the employer and employee."

Employers can choose to enroll an employee in the eLearning center with access to every course, or limit access to courses that are job-specific.

When an employer pays for an employee to travel to a seminar or hires an instructor the costs quickly multiply. With the eLearning Center, employers pay for a monthly or yearly subscription per employee for the program that allows unlimited access to all of the available courses or limited access to job-specific tutorials. The eLearning center includes certificates, transcripts, group discussions and access to new courses added every month.

Current course content comes from a growing list of nationally recognized companies including: Skillsoft, Microsoft, Franklin Covey and Emily Posts. In addition to the nationally recognized content creators, chamber members will have the opportunity to submit their own training courses and materials to the e-Learning Center to be used by employers across the country.

Courses offered include: accounting and finance, business ethics, customer service, graphics and digital media, human resources, QuickBooks for small business, web marketing, and sales and marketing.

The chamber launched the eLearning Center last month. It can be accessed through the chamber website, www.visaliachamber.org. For more information, call the Visalia Chamber at 734-5876 or visit www.visaliachamber.org.

Probation Department to Combat DUI

The Tulare County Probation Department has been awarded a traffic safety grant for a yearlong program aimed at preventing deaths and injuries resulting from driving under the influence (DUI).

The $75,000 Intensive Probation Supervision for High-Risk Felony and Repeat DUI Offenders grant awarded by the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to Tulare County will aid in the county's ongoing effort to improve traffic safety and the quality of life. Special probation supervision measures will target high-risk, felony and repeat DUI offenders in the county. The probation department will also work with other local law enforcement agencies on anti-DUI efforts as part of an on-going commitment to keep roadways safe through both enforcement and education.

Tulare County Chief Probation Officer Christie Myer said the intent of the program is to respond quickly and aggressively to felony DUI offenders through the assignment of a full-time probation officer.

"Felony driving under the influence is a serious offense and convicted offenders require close probation supervision to ensure compliance with the terms of their release and immediate consequences for violations – including re-arrest," Myer said. "Probation officers have been working DUI checkpoints with local law enforcement agencies for several years. Involvement by the probation department has resulted in the arrest of probation violators, increased program involvement, greater collaboration among law enforcement and safer communities."

The grant is aimed at reducing the number of persons killed and injured in alcohol and other drug-related collisions in the county. Funded strategies include intensive supervision, unannounced home contacts and searches, surveillance operations, highly publicized warrant service operations, alcohol and drug testing, and the distribution of "hot sheets" to local law enforcement agencies.

The grant will assist in efforts to deal with high-risk DUI offenders who pose a significant risk to local communities. Funded activities will include the increased monitoring of treatment and DUI program participation, warrant sweeps, unannounced residence searches and random alcohol/drug testing to ensure compliance with court-ordered terms of probation.

Drunk driving is one of America's deadliest crimes. In 2012, more than 10,000 people died in highway crashes across the country, involving a driver or motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol concentration of .08 or higher. In California, the number killed was 802.

"California's roadways are still among the safest in the nation," said OTS Director Rhonda Craft, "but to meet future mobility, safety and sustainability objectives, we must create safer roadways for all users. The Tulare County Probation Department will be using these and other resources to reach the vision we all share – toward zero deaths, every one counts."

Funding for this program is from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

SoCalGas' Holiday Safety Tips

As preparations begin for the Holiday season, Southern California Gas Co. (SoCalGas) is reminding its customers of important safety tips to keep friends and loved ones safe during the Holidays and year-round.

Customers should be vigilant and question anyone who presents themselves as a representative of SoCalGas. The following tips can help you protect your home from utility-worker imposters:

- All SoCalGas employees carry proper photo identification when called out to any job.
- Verify the employee's uniform and identification before letting anyone in the home. Most field employees also drive a company vehicle.
- SoCalGas and employees will always be happy to wait while the customer confirms their identity.
- Most of the time a SoCalGas employee visits a home or business in response to a service request. If no one scheduled an appointment, call SoCalGas at 1-800-427-2200 (or 1-800-342-4545 in Spanish) before allowing anyone inside the home or property.

As temperatures drop, another threat to safety is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO poisoning can occur as a result of a poorly ventilated heater or a CO leak from another source. Symptoms can include nausea, headaches, paralysis and even death. SoCalGas wants its customers to remember the following tips to help prevent CO poisoning:

- Have natural gas furnaces checked at least once a year by a licensed heating contractor or SoCalGas.
- Vacuum and clean regularly in and around the furnace, particularly around the burner compartment to prevent a build-up of dust and lint.
- Never store items in, on or around the appliance that can obstruct airflow.
- Most forced-air units have a filter that cleans the air before heating and circulating it throughout the home. Check furnace filters every month during the heating season and clean or replace the filter when necessary.
- When installing a new or cleaned furnace filter, be sure to re-install the front panel door of the furnace properly so it fits snugly; never operate the furnace without the front-panel door properly in place because doing so may create the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Check the appearance of the flame. If the flame is yellow, large and unsteady, the furnace needs to be inspected immediately by a licensed heating contractor or SoCalGas .
- Using an unvented gas heater in your home is dangerous and a violation of the California Health and Safety Code.
- Never use your oven, range or outdoor barbecue to heat your home because these appliances are not designed for this purpose.
- If you suspect that you or a loved one is suffering from CO poisoning, call 911 immediately.
- Visit socalgas.com/safety for more information on staying safe.

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TCOE Wins Prestigious Golden Bell Award

For its work in developing a program to promote, integrate and support 21st Century learning into all areas of education both locally and outside the county, Tulare County Office of Education's Educational Resource Services (ERS) will receive a Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association (CSBA) this month in San Francisco. The prestigious award, now in its 35th year, is being given to ERS for its Common Core Implementation & Support program, along with programs in 60 other districts and county offices of education this year.

"The ERS Common Core Implementation & Support program was an intentional investment in the future of our students," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "The result is the creation of an innovative instructional culture that is getting a lot of attention statewide."

According to Charlene Stringham, assistant superintendent of Instructional Services, ERS's Common Core Implementation & Support program provides multi-faceted services to educators. "Our program includes extensive professional development offerings, on-site mentoring partnerships in 57 districts, interdepartmental CCSS collaborative efforts, a wide array of relevant, engaging, CCSS-aligned student events, and a popular CCSS resource website," she said. "The ERS Common Core Implementation & Support program is directly impacting student learning by providing educators, parents, community members and all stakeholders with exemplary services and resources to promote 21st Century shifts in curriculum, instruction, assessment and most importantly, student achievement."

ERS built its Common Core Implementation & Support program in less than four years, beginning with the State Board of Education's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in August 2010. One of the key elements to the program was the development of a comprehensive, multi-topic Common Core State Standards professional development series. Today, the ERS Professional Development Catalog includes over 150 courses, which last year were attended by over 8,000 educators, locally and throughout the region.

The expansion of ERS's site-based professional development, coaching, and consulting services was another important component of the ERS Common Core Implementation & Support effort. To date, ERS team members are contracted to provide customized support, including instructional planning, model lesson demonstration, and data analysis, in 57 districts and seven programs throughout the region for a total of over 2,500 days, or 14 years, of staff time.

Internally, ERS has worked to guide the alignment of other TCOE Instructional Services and Special Services programs to incorporate 21st Century learning. The program also created the popular Common Core Connect website, which serves as a repository of resources and tools that have been developed or vetted, indexed and catalogued into a searchable database. The site also contains TCOE-developed resources that are freely shared with educators who wish to adopt them to align with their local initiatives. Website analytics reveal that during a recent 30-day time period, 12,480 site pages were viewed by 4,353 visitors, many of whom are from other regions and states.

"Rolling out the Common Core is a daunting task," said Jacqueline Cardenas, director of curriculum and instruction for Los Nietos School District in Los Angeles County. "If I were to select one high quality website in California that I can turn to for exceptional 'download and use today' planning tools and instructional resources for our teachers and administrators, it would be the Common Core Connect on the TCOE website."

For more information on ERS's Common Core Implementation & Support program, call Charlene Stringham at 651-3831.

Step Up Youth Challenge Kicks into Gear

Tulare County's Step Up Youth Challenge program kicked into full gear with a fall summit at the Visalia Convention Center that brought together more than 350 youth representing 29 middle, junior and high schools from throughout Tulare County.

The Step Up Youth Challenge is a seven-month program designed to engage a diverse group of junior high and high school students in a service learning-based Challenge Project that impacts their school culture and community. Schools completing a project will compete in a challenge to win grants for their school. The program is sponsored by the Tulare County Gang Prevention Task Force, whose goal is to decrease gang activity and support the growth of positive options for youth throughout Tulare County.

The program has been successful since its inception in 2011. As a result of its accomplishments, this is the fourth year in a row the program has taken place.

"We are delighted that students from across Tulare County will be participating in the Youth Challenge this year," said Tulare County Board of Supervisors Chair Phil Cox. "The Step Up Youth Challenge continues to have a proven track record of success and will have a positive impact on all schools participating."

Schools participating in the summit attended various workshops to help them create a plan to implement a Challenge Project that addresses a theme that is locally important to their school or community. Schools chose projects that addressed gangs, drug abuse, peer pressure, bullying, self-esteem and suicide prevention.

"One of the most important features of Step Up Youth Challenge is that the projects developed for each campus will be youth-designed and youth-driven," said Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "We know from experience that youth-driven projects have a greater potential for success as students take ownership in the process. We are anxious to see what develops and track the positive effects at each school."

Participants will have until April 2015 to implement and complete their project, and will turn in a report on their Challenge Project and enter in a competition to win a grant for their school. All participants will then be recognized at a red carpet event in May at the L.J. Williams Community Theater in Visalia.

Middle schools participating in the challenge are: Burton, Divisadero, El Monte, Green Acres, Jefferson, La Joya, Lincoln Elementary, Mulcahy, Pixley, Pleasant View, Sundale, Sycamore Valley, Valley Life, Valley Oak, Washington, Washington Intermediate, Willow Glen, Woodlake Valley and Wilson Middle.

Participating high schools are: Citrus, Eleanor Roosevelt, Farmersville, Mission Oak, Mt. Whitney, Orosi, Sequoia, Summit Charter Collegiate Academy, Tech Prep and University Preparatory.

For more information on the Step Up Youth Challenge, call Allison Pierce at 636-5000 or visit www.stepuptc.com.

Print replica edition at issuu.com/ourvalleyvoice

On Facebook at facebook.com/ourvalleyvoice

VUSD Honors Tulare County Symphony for Youth Education

The Visalia Unified School District honored the Tulare County Symphony for its long history of music education at its board meeting on November 18 at the district office.

Doug Bartsch, assistant superintendent, told the symphony he appreciated the 55 years that the symphony has performed youth concerts, providing important enrichment for Visalia students.

"Unlike many school districts in recent years, our district has not reduced funding for music. In fact, investment in music has increased," he said. "Some say that music is important because research demonstrates that students who study music perform better in other subjects like math and reading. We do not feel the need to justify music education this way.

"In Visalia Unified, we think that music is important because it is part of a complete education. Making and performing music is life enriching. Music is a source of joy and is a medium for communication like no other. As in athletics, making music with other people provides the setting for developing relationships and character traits like self-discipline, perseverance and commitment."

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Creek Maintenance at Mill Creek and McAuliff. Top - before. Bottom - after.

Visalia Storm Preparedness Efforts Expand

With additional resources funded by the voter-approved Kaweah Lake and Local Storm Water Maintenance fee, the City of Visalia's storm preparedness efforts have been expanded in preparation of potential upcoming winter storms.

City crews conduct storm preparedness activities annually by checking materials, supplies, equipment, and storm facilities and systems in late summer and early fall. Maintenance of the storm drain system has been significantly increased over the last year due to the additional staff funded by the fee approved by voters in March 2013. Since then, the two storm maintenance crews have been successful in improving the capacity of the city's storm system through additional maintenance.

Some of the activities conducted with the additional resources funded by the fee include:

- Significant basin maintenance at Shannon Parkway and Demaree, Visalia Parkway and Chinowth, Walnut and Roeben, Cameron and West, and Ferguson and Roeben.
- Significant creek system maintenance completed in Packwood Creek at Cameron (pictured above), Mill Creek at McAuliff, and Jennings Ditch east of Ben Maddox and south of Houston.
- Basin and creek maintenance included removal of 1,150 tons of vegetation and debris, and repair of creek sections to significantly increase capacity.
- Substantial increase in maintenance on storm piping system including annually removing 15 to 20 tons of grit and debris from the piping system.

Kaweah Delta Receives Accreditation to Offer Surgical Residency Programs

Kaweah Delta Health Care District has received accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education for its fifth Graduate Medical Education (GME) Programs.

The surgical medical residency program at Kaweah Delta was awarded initial accreditation from the ACGME and became the 22nd surgery residency program in California. The accreditation will allow the program, affiliated with UC Irvine, to begin recruiting physicians who have recently completed medical school and have received doctoral degrees in medicine. The program will enroll two residents for the first five years, starting in July 2015. Kaweah Delta participated in a site visit earlier this year for accreditation.

"It's great news, there's no other way to describe it," said Dr. Sebastiano Cassaro, program director of the surgery residency program. "We had already begun receiving inquiries into this program when it formally did not exist. We expect this surgery residency program to be highly competitive and interview 100 applicants for every spot."

To select its first class of two physicians, Kaweah Delta will participate in The National Resident Matching Program. The matching program will provide Kaweah Delta with up to 200 applications from interested medical students and recent medical school graduates to begin interviews this year.

Kaweah Delta has residency training programs in the areas of Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Psychiatry, Transitional Year and General Surgery. The five residency programs are bringing physicians who have recently graduated medical school to Tulare County to complete training in their respective specialties. It is estimated that between 40-50% of the physicians who train in Tulare County through the residency programs will remain and practice in the Visalia area.

Established in 1963, Kaweah Delta Health Care District is the only facility with Magnet status in the San Joaquin Valley serving children and adults and is the only trauma center between Fresno and Bakersfield. The district offers a comprehensive scope of services including everything from a well-respected pediatric hospitalist program to nationally recognized orthopedic and cancer programs.

For more information, visit www.kaweahdelta.org.

Tiny Houses

Continued from p. 1

house owner, including deciding on wheels or a foundation, and whether to rely on solar energy. She also promotes the idea of tiny houses wherever she can.

"People are tired of mortgages and keeping up all their possessions," she said. "Possessions are a lot of work. I think people are looking for a simpler life."

B.A. Norrgard at home.

Tiny house communities need water and some houses need electricity, she said. "A shared laundry facility and an Internet connection would be good," she added, "and definitely a community garden." She also believes that a campfire is important. "It gives a sense of community. It's a gathering place. Good things always happen around a campfire."

According to Norrgard, the biggest misconception that people have about tiny houses is that they provide low-income housing. "$26,000 doesn't sound bad until you calculate the cost per square foot."

Although the idea appeals to a lot of people, Norrgard said that most of those interested in tiny houses are "a lot of empty nesters and a lot of single women. It's their time."

Have house, will travel.

A woman named Mary was at the open house on her way to see tiny houses in Vancouver. "This is a tiny house research road trip," she explained.

Her partner, Tamara, said their plan is to get a tiny house 30' long by 10' wide, along with a smaller house. "Then we'll also have a smaller one to live in," she said. "If she gets tired of me, she can go in the other one to spend the afternoon."

Tamara likes the idea of living in a tiny house because it's less expensive and she believes that a tiny house would provide her some relief from her "multiple chemical sensitivities."

"It's kind of fascinating to me," said Stephen, who was recently widowed. "This is the closest I've come to living off the grid. I'm looking for something energy-efficient."

Annie, who drove up from Orange, may be living in a tiny house in the near future. "I retire in about 157 workdays," she said with a big smile. "I rent a house. I'm a single parent so I could never buy a home in Orange County."

Annie runs tinyhouseresource.com, which provides information about the "Tiny House Movement." She also has a Facebook page with 1,700 followers. She said that sustainability, a small footprint, economic reasons and concern about the environment are making tiny houses attractive to a wide range of people.

"Even the people here (at the open house) are coming for different reasons," she said. "All of them find this common ground. It resonates with so many people."

"I downsized my house and my husband," said Amy, who drove up from the San Fernando Valley. "The kids went to college, although one has creeped back.

"I don't want a mortgage and there's no house that I can afford," she added. "I really like the he idea of being able to pick up and move. I have issues with making decisions so it would be good."

For more information about Lemon Cove Village, visit lemoncovevillage.com or call 370-4152.

Censure

Continued from p. 1

to do because they're only two of you, but you have to constantly remind each other that we can't each take it to another member."

The Brown Act states: "A majority of the members of a legislative body shall not, outside an authorized meeting, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body." With seven board members, any behind-the-scenes discussion of an issue by four or more members would violate the Brown Act.

"Mr. Ulmschneider is extremely interested in having German be added," said Wheaton, who added that Ulmschneider delivered packets of information and "talked to some members" about that issue.

"We're just trying to encourage him to follow the Brown Act," said VUSD Board President Jim Qualls. "He's quoted the Brown Act on other occasions. He wanted the school district to be transparent.

"He's a board member," he added. "He has to follow certain rules. So far, he's chosen to ignore us and that puts us in a dilemma. This is all we can do. We don't intend to violate the Brown Act." The decision to draft a resolution to censure is "because he won't take no for an answer. He's fully chosen to push the situation.

"I'm not here to bully him, it just can't be tolerated," Qualls continued. "As a board member, it hurts us when a board member chooses to act this way."

In response to a question about whether Ulmschneider is being treated differently as a result of previous disagreements with other board members, Qualls said, "I would have done it to any other board member. We work hard to maintain trust and we don't want to lose it over this issue."

At the November 18 board meeting, Qualls cited phone calls from Ulmschneider that were received by himself and other board members to discuss the issue of foreign languages. The remaining five members reported receiving an information packet from Ulmschneider, but most of them did not open it. Three reported having meetings with Ulmschneider where the issue was discussed.

"I believe the board members were not aware of Mr. Ulmschneider's actions by discussing foreign languages and are not at fault of the violation of the Brown Act, since Mr. Ulmschneider did not state that he had spoken to other board members, except me," said Qualls. "I was aware that he had spoken to Mr. (William) Fulmer and Mr. (John) Crabtree."

Qualls then directed Wheaton to draft a resolution to censure Ulmschneider.

"My name was pilloried quite a bit here," said Ulmschneider, when called upon for a response. "That information is public. I gave them a packet tonight. It's all from the Internet, outside the district but from the California Department of Education, the U.S. Census. Please take that information, and I'm going to give Dr. Wheaton also exactly what I gave to you. The biggest task was to make sure that you all had that same public information that I had, which was putting things in perspective.

"There's no secret that I'd like to see our next language be a non-romance, which looks to the east, but German, but there are lots of languages on there that I had done an analysis of," he continued. "Don't be afraid of information. Information is good. It is public. I want people to see it to know. Just about all of it, except for some comments that I had made with my professional judgment of 40-some-plus years of working with and learning foreign languages, would help us in arriving at our decision. I did not persuade anybody. I simply gave information and that was it.

"I did look at the Brown Act. I do not see where there's any violation," Ulmschneider added. "The Brown Act is your law against closed meetings. There's open meetings. It's designed to make sure everything is public. Tonight I gave everybody here a packet and I'm willing to discuss it but it takes time because it's a very complicated subject.

"The intent was not to circumvent anything but to make things transparent, which is what the Brown Act is all about," said Ulmschneider.

Hearing

Continued from p. 1

coming before the Tulare County Board of Supervisors to request another mining permit at McKay Point. Tulare Irrigation District (TID) took three years to hammer out a contract with the multinational to mine the gravel and help finance the building of a 4,000-acre-foot reservoir at McKay Point. If CEMEX balks at fully compensating the Stillwell mine neighbors for expenses and lost value to their properties, and ignores the needs of the farmers living next to the Lemon Cove facility, then TID might be forced to find a new partner. According one local, "TID is going to have to look for someone else to dig up their gravel because it's not going to be CEMEX."

The public hearing will be taking place in the chambers of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, Administration Building, County Civic Center, 2800 W. Burrel, Visalia. For further information regarding the hearing, call Chuck Przybylski, planner III, at 624-7000.

CEMEX Withdraws Faulty Interim Management Plan

Transparency has not been CEMEX' modus operandi, and will be a major stumbling block for the multi-national when it comes looking for future permits. On May 13, 2013--unbeknownst to the mine's neighbors or RMA--CEMEX stopped production at the Stillwell mine. This fact was not disclosed until the day CEMEX submitted its Interim Management Plan (IMP). An IMP is required one year and 90 days after a mine has ceased production in order for a mine to be declared idle and not abandoned. If Stillwell mine were declared abandoned, CEMEX would have been required to start the reclamation process immediately. Reclamation could cost the gravel mining company hundreds of thousands of dollars and may have motivated CEMEX to submit an IMP.

In exactly one year and 90 days after stopping production at Stillwell mine, Benchmark Resources, a consulting company hired by CEMEX, submitted a draft IMP document to the RMA. Mike Spata, director of the RMA, determined that, for a myriad of reasons, Stillwell mine did not meet the conditions to designate the mine as idle and their application was denied. CEMEX had 30 days to respond to the county's findings. In their response they agreed with many of Spata's findings and withdrew their IMP.

If CEMEX had been successful in getting the mine declared idle they could have stretched their permit out for another ten years without doing any reclamation. The question about whether, or when, CEMEX needs to submit another IMP is not clear.

Because the mine did not qualify as idle, it should have been declared abandoned and CEMEX should have been directed to start the reclamation process. But because RMA rejected the IMP, and CEMEX in turn withdrew their application, the mine's status wallows in legal limbo. Now it is up to the lawyers to determine when, how--and if--an IMP should be submitted. This could take years. Either way, CEMEX has achieved its goal of avoiding costly reclamation--for now.

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Briefly...

Visalia Police Department Partners with Nextdoor.com

This week, the Visalia Police Department announced a partnership with Nextdoor (www.nextdoor.com), a private social network for neighborhoods to build stronger, safer communities with the help of residents. This integration with Nextdoor will enable the department to communicate online with city neighborhoods. Residents and police will be able to work together to improve safety and strengthen Neighborhood Watch efforts.

"We have always invested in innovative ways to increase safety for our residents," said Sergeant Damon Maurice. "With Nextdoor, we can help empower neighbors to keep their communities safe and connected and give them the ability to collaborate on virtual Neighborhood Watch efforts."

With Nextdoor, Visalia residents can join private neighborhood websites to share information, including neighborhood public safety issues, community events and activities, local services and even lost pets. The Visalia Police Department will be able to post information, such as safety tips and crime alerts, to Nextdoor websites within the city. Nextdoor users are reminded this platform is not a method to report emergencies, criminal activity or request any other assistance from the department. Existing reporting methods are to be used in such instances.

Nextdoor is free for residents and the Visalia Police Department. Each Visalia neighborhood has its own private Nextdoor neighborhood website, accessible only to residents who verify that they live in the neighborhood. Neighborhoods establish and self-manage their own Nextdoor websites and the police department will not be able to access residents' websites, contact information, or content. Information shared on Nextdoor is password protected and cannot be accessed by search engines.

Those interested in joining their neighborhood's Nextdoor website can visit www.nextdoor.com and enter their address. If residents have questions about their website, please visit www.help.nextdoor.com.

For more Neighborhood Watch Program information, call Crime Prevention Coordinator Samantha Ferrero at 713-4370.

Low Cost Spay & Neuter Clinic to Host Grand Opening

The grand opening of the new Valley Oak SPCA Low Cost Spay & Neuter Clinic is scheduled for Saturday, December 6, from 9am to 2pm, at 9405 W. Goshen Ave. (at Plaza Drive) in Visalia.

Visitors will have a chance to meet clinic staff and tour the new facility, enjoy a pancake breakfast hosted by Visalia Breakfast Lions Club from 9am-11am, listen to KJUG live remote from 10am-noon, enter to win Valley Oak SPCA tote bags with goodies, and meet some dogs and cats available for adoption. Tacos and beverages will be available after 11:30am.

For more information or to set an appointment, call 741-1121.

FHCN Donates $5,000 for Local Drought Relief Efforts

Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) announced that it has donated $5,000 to Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) to aid in the organization's local drought relief efforts. On November 21, Kerry Hydash, FHCN president and CEO, presented a check to Tom Collishaw, CEO of SHE, at the organization's corporate office. With thousands of residents without water to drink, cook, clean or shower, FHCN's donation will support SHE's efforts to provide immediate relief to these residents who have been adversely affected by the drought.

"As a health care provider, we know that the drought has had serious effects on many families in Tulare County, with a direct impact on their health and quality of life," said Hydash. "The holidays can be a struggle for many families and FHCN wanted to do its part to provide some relief for families in need."

FHCN supports various social causes and conducts various fundraising activities throughout the year with the goal of contributing to the improvement of health and the quality of life of its patients. Each holiday season, FHCN provides 100 patients nominated by its employees with food, blankets and toys through its Anita Fund. The Anita Fund is primarily funded through employee-sponsored donations. In 2009, the organization also created the Anita de la Vega Scholarship Fund, which provides educational scholarships to local students pursuing a degree in health or community health. Since 2009, FHCN has provided $14,400 in scholarships to students in Tulare and Kings Counties.

For more information about Family HealthCare Network, call Nikki Gilman, marketing and communications coordinator at 737-4746, or visit www.FHCN.org. For more information regarding Self-Help Enterprises' drought relief efforts, call staff member Julie Cabañas at 802-1610.

2014 Holiday Book Program Underway

Usborne Books, GateWay Church and the Conyer School PTA have partnered for the 2014 Holiday Book Program that will provide a free new book for each Conyer student as well as books for each teacher and many for the library.

GateWay Church supports its neighbor, Conyer School, in many ways including labor to help clean up the school when needed, a facility to host school programs and backpacks for kindergarteners in August.

This fall, Usborne Books, GateWay and the Conyer PTA decided to give a book to each child as a special Holiday treat that they can enjoy during winter break, and they each contributed toward the $3,100 cost. Teachers chose from a list of Usborne books so that each child's book would be the perfect one for him or her. GateWay's High School Ministry will wrap all 535 books as part of its small group activities.

Conyer will host its Holiday program on the GateWay campus on December 19 at noon and the books will be given to each student as the classes exit the main auditorium.

Park Visalia to Honor Vietnam War Veterans

Park Visalia will host a dinner honoring Vietnam War Veterans for their service. This is an invitation-only event for veterans and a guest. A Veterans Christmas Tree provided by AseraCare of Fresno will be decorated in red, white and blue ornaments with ribbons for the veterans to write their name and service dates or branch.

Carroll Sweet will be the special guest speaker and give a thank you speech honoring these soldiers and their service to our country. Carroll served in the United States Army for six years and was in Vietnam as an infantryman for one year. He was awarded the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars. He then enlisted in the United States Navy and served for 20 years, participating in Grenada intervention, and serving on an aircraft carrier during the Gulf War. He is currently the Training Coordinator at Lemoore Naval Air Station.

A dinner prayer and a remembrance for those who did not make it back will follow the talk. For more information, call Bridget Elmore 625-3388.

NaphCare Awarded Contract with Kings County Sheriff's Office

NaphCare, Inc., an independent partner to correctional facilities nationwide for innovative healthcare management and technology solutions, has been awarded a new contract to provide comprehensive healthcare services for the Kings County Sheriff's Office. Services began on December 1.

NaphCare was selected after a competitive bid process. As part of the agreement, NaphCare installed its customized correctional healthcare electronic health record (EHR) system, TechCare on the first day of operations. TechCare will enhance security, create efficiencies and increase communication for both medical and security, by integrating outside vendors, automating the sick call process and decreasing movement inside the jail.

NaphCare will also provide off-site services that include network development and contracting, medical scheduling and complete system to better manage inmates' healthcare and costs.

"We are excited to begin our partnership with Sheriff Robinson and Kings County," said NaphCare CEO James S. McLane. "We believe that trust is a key component in any new partnership and with that trust we commit to provide high-quality proactive care utilizing our experience in the field to implement cost savings for the county."

Brandman University to Host Substitute Teacher Job Fair

Brandman University, in conjunction with the Kings County Office of Education, will host a Substitute Teacher Job Fair on December 11 from 2-6pm at 325 Mall Drive, Hanford. For details about the event, or for more information about becoming a substitute teacher, call 587-3446 or email shutchis@brandman.edu.

Porterville University to Host Free Resume Workshop

Porterville College will offer a free resume workshop on December 13 from 8-10am at Computer Commons A/B on the Porterville College campus, 100 E. College Ave., Porterville. For reservations or more information, call 791-2216.

California Connections Academy Students, Parents to Create Holiday Cards

This Friday, California Connections Academy, a tuition-free online public school, will host students and their families for a Holiday card drive. The cards will go towards the Red Cross Holiday Mail for Heroes program, which empowers people to "Give Something that Means Something" by sending a card of thanks and support to the members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families.

The event will also serve as a socialization opportunity for the school's K-12 students from Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings and Tulare counties. Throughout the school year, California Connections Academy hosts several field trips across the Central Valley to give online classmates a chance for hands-on learning and socializing with their peers.

California Connections Academy is a tuition-free online public school where students receive a high quality, personalized, public education outside the traditional classroom. For more information, call 713-1324.

FHCN Welcomes New Provider in Cutler-Orosi

Family HealthCare Network welcomed Rafael Alonso Jr., MPA as the newest addition to its provider team in Cutler-Orosi. As a physician assistant, Alonso will offer family medicine services for patients of FHCN's Cutler-Orosi Health Center.

Alonso completed his master of physician assistant studies at San Joaquin Valley College and also holds his bachelor of science in health science from California State University, Fresno, along with his master of public administration from National University, Fresno. He has more than 10 years of experience serving patients in the Central Valley. Alonso is fluent in both Spanish and English.

The Cutler-Orosi Health Center is located at 12586 Avenue 408 in Orosi, and is open Monday through Friday, 7am to 9pm, and Saturdays, from 7am to 5pm. For more information, call 1-877-960-3426.

Family HealthCare Network is a private nonprofit organization that operates federally qualified health centers. FHCN operates 18 sites, of which 14 are community health centers located in Tulare and Kings Counties.

Local Company Develops New Natural Rosacea Supplement and Cream

Dermatology Labs LLC, a supplement company based in Visalia, has announced the development of a new whole-food-based antioxidant skin formula called CamuClear to treat rosacea, a stubborn skin condition that affects 16 million Americans.

This proprietary blend of "superfoods" includes vitamins, omegas and beneficial algae to help nourish the skin and support the immune system. The CamuClear oral supplement helps provide the body with all the essential nutrients it needs to maintain healthy skin, and the spot treatment attacks flare-ups and blemished areas externally.

For more information, visit www.camuclear.com/rosaceatreatment2.html.

Education

First 5-Funded Program Sees Jump in Literacy

Staff Reports

Children from some of the most impoverished areas of Tulare County are gaining literacy skills and becoming better prepared for school thanks to the Early Steps to School Success program funded by First 5 Tulare County.

The program is provided by Save the Child Federation, an international organization, and offered through public schools in Alpaugh, Farmersville, Poplar, Strathmore, Terra Bella and Tipton.

According to data in the most recent First 5 Annual Report, 80% of 3-year-olds in the program scored at or above the normal range for vocabulary acquisition.

On average, literacy improvement among the children in the program equates to an additional 3.4 months of schooling.

"School readiness is a focus for First 5 Tulare County, and literacy is a hugely important component of that readiness," noted Janet Hogan, First 5 Tulare County's executive director. "Many factors impact the ability to read, including physical development, motor skills and the ability to detect patterns visually."

The push for school readiness begins at the beginning, in home visits with pregnant moms, explained SaRonn Mitchell, who oversees the local program for Save the Child Federation.

Most of the Tulare County families in the program are monolingual, low-income Spanish speakers, and participation is largely through word of mouth.

Staff members, who are employed by the individual school districts, teach the moms about child development and nutrition, and encourage participation in the parent-child groups to network and learn.

"We coordinate home visits to help parents because they truly are the first teachers," Mitchell said. "We provide the tools and demonstrate what they can do at home to encourage healthy development in their children."

The program next focuses on children from birth through age 3, and then from age 3 to 5. Staff helps the parents understand the importance of encouraging fine motor skills, language and social-emotional development, all of which are important to school success, Mitchell explained.

A key component of the program is a book bag exchange, in which parents receive a bag with books that they are encouraged to read to their child and then exchange with other parents. Books are offered in English and Spanish, and in both languages.

"We encourage parents to read to their children, so they develop a love of reading and a culture of literacy," Mitchell explained. "We help them talk to their child about what they see on the page, even if they themselves cannot read. They make up their own stories and talk with the child. Telling stories builds vocabulary."

Each parent is tasked with tracking how much time they spend reading to their children, with a requirement of at least once a day. Sharing stories, singing and talking while cooking or doing laundry all contribute to building vocabulary.

Each child is tested using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, so growth in vocabulary can be documented.

"Without this program, many of these families would receive no services from birth through age 3," Mitchell noted. "Teachers are seeing the difference. Children in first grade who went through the program are reading at grade level and that had never happened before. We are making an impact and raising the bar on parents' expectations for their children.

"It used to be that parents would be satisfied if their child completed eighth grade – that's the level of their expectation – so their children didn't complete high school. But we are changing that. I have invested my life in literacy development because I really believe it makes a difference."

Throughout the program, staff members also evaluate each family's level of risk in terms of resources and refer families for additional services.

"If the parents are worried about how to feed their children or they have substandard housing or there are mental health issues, the children are affected," Mitchell said. "We provide resources and referrals to reduce risk, help them worry less and become more successful in life."

For information about First 5 Tulare County, call 622-8650 or visit www.first5tc.org.

Mackenzie Mitchell and Jazmine Morfin are pictured recording a promotional video for the food drive. Through the use of a green screen, Mackenzie was able to integrate Hunger Games-style backgrounds for the version that was shown to students each week.

University Prep Students Initiate 'Hunger Games' Food Drive

Staff Reports

Jazmine Morfin, a University Preparatory High School (UPHS) junior and Leadership Club president, saw something online that inspired her to make a difference in Tulare County.

"Jazmine is always looking for a project," said UPHS Lead Teacher Helen Milliorn-Feller. "She has the ambition and the compassion to initiate projects that can make a difference in the community, asking the staff 'can we do this here?'"

What Jazmine found was the DoSomething.org website, which challenges young people to take action in their communities to solve a problem. There, among the dozens of community engagement ideas, was a "Hunger Games"-themed food drive.

Jazmine and her classmates seized on the idea of creating their own food drive and modeling it after the popular book and movie series. The leadership club organized homerooms into "districts" like those in the films. Each district was represented by a pair of seniors, who served as "tributes" to compete in a variety of fun events. Together, Jazmine and classmate Mackenzie Mitchell recorded four promotional broadcasts in the style of "The Hunger Games." The weekly broadcasts were shown in homerooms and designed to build excitement and participation in the food drive. The videos also served as a project for Mrs. Milliorn-Feller's journalism class.

To encourage the students, UPHS's Parent Support Organization (PSO) pledged to rent out a movie auditorium for a private screening of the newly released "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay" movie for all UPHS students to attend if they were successful in raising 5,000 or more food items. At the end of the drive, which concluded November 18, faculty and students counted all the cans and food items and there were 5,055. The PSO honored their promise to help take the collected items to the Visalia Rescue Mission and Bethlehem Center food shelters.

Jazmine, who one day hopes to work in international business helping people throughout the world, said, "As part of our campaign, we worked to educate each other about hunger in our county and globally. I learned that as many as 17,000 Tulare County children go hungry each day. It was something that many of us didn't realize."

The "Hunger Games"-themed food drive and the upcoming jeans and coat drive mesh well with UPHS's mission to provide leadership and service learning opportunities to each student. To learn more about supporting UPHS's coat and jeans drive this month, call Helen Milliorn-Feller at 730-2529.

It's Musical Season Again!

Craig Wheaton, Ed.D.

Get out your new 2015 calendar and schedule some dates--it is show time! For many years, our community has grown accustomed to excellent high school performing arts productions. Everything from band to dance, we have wonderful performances all year long and school musicals are perhaps the best example of this longstanding tradition.

"Guys & Dolls" will be performed by El Diamante High School on Wednesday, January 21, through Saturday, January 24. This is a classic, and it will bring back memories of the fifties Broadway musical. All the high society folks are in town, and they're depending on Nathan Detroit to set up a famous gambling party. The only problem is… he needs $1,000 to rent a place. Throw in Sarah Brown; Sky Masterson, who accepts Nathan's $1,000 bet that he can't get Sarah Brown to go with him to Havana; Miss Adelaide, who wants Nathan to marry her; Police Lieutenant Brannigan; and the music/lyrics of Frank Loesser; and you've got quite a musical!

"Mary Poppins, the Musical" will be performed by Redwood High School on Thursday, February 5, through Saturday, February 7. It is based on the beloved books by P.L Travers and music from the Disney movie starring Julie Andrews. We will be the first high school in California to perform this show. It is a delightful story for the whole family!

"Grease" will be performed by Mount Whitney High School on Thursday, February 18, through Saturday, February 21. This is a popular musical and Mount Whitney has an incredible cast and is excited to perform the classic movie songs along with some rarely heard musical versions! Come out and support them, and you'll probably find yourself singing along with the cast.

"Anything Goes" will be performed by Golden West High School on Wednesday, April 15, through Saturday, April 18. The age-old tale of boy-meets-girl and the complications that ensue will intrigue every audience member. No musical puts in on stage better than "Anything Goes." More than 115 Golden West students will participate in this year's musical.

The Green Acres Middle School musical tradition continues with "The Music Man." The plot concerns conman Harold Hill, who poses as a boys' band organizer and leader and sells band instruments and uniforms to the naive Iowa townsfolk, promising to train the members of the new band. But Harold is no musician, he plans to skip town without giving any music lessons. Prim librarian and piano teacher Marian sees through him; but when Harold helps her younger brother overcome his social awkwardness, Marian begins to fall in love. Harold risks being caught to win her. Come out and support the Green Acres tradition!

This year's musical selections are excellent choices for family entertainment. Get your friends and family together, go out and get your tickets early because several shows will be sellouts. Prepare to be entertained!

Craig Wheaton, Ed.D., is superintendent of the Visalia Unified School District.

Viewpoint

The United States is No. 1 – But in What?

Lawrence S. Wittner

American politicians are fond of telling their audiences that the United States is the greatest country in the world. Is there any evidence for this claim?

Well, yes. When it comes to violence and preparations for violence, the United States is, indeed, No. 1. In 2013, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the U.S. government accounted for 37% of world military expenditures, putting it far ahead of all other nations. (The two closest competitors, China and Russia, accounted for 11% and 5% respectively.) From 2004 to 2013, the United States was also the No. 1 weapons exporter in the world. Moreover, given the U.S. government's almost continuous series of wars and acts of military intervention since 1941, it seems likely that it surpasses all rivals when it comes to international violence.

This record is paralleled on the domestic front, where the United States has more guns and gun-related deaths than any other country. A study released in late 2013 reported that the United States had 88 guns for every 100 people, and 40 gun-related deaths for every 400,000 people — the most of any of the 27 economically developed countries surveyed. By contrast, in Britain there were six guns per 100 people and one gun-related death per 400,000 people.

Yet, in a great many other areas, the United States is not No. 1 at all.

Take education. In late 2013, the Program for International Student Assessment released a report on how 15-year old students from 65 nations performed on its tests. The report showed that U.S. students ranked 17th in reading and 21st in math. An international survey a bit earlier that year by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the ranking was slightly worse for American adults. In 2014, Pearson, a multinational educational services company, placed the United States 20th in the world in "educational attainment" — well behind Poland and the Slovak Republic.

American healthcare and health fare even worse. In a 2014 study of healthcare (including infant mortality, healthy life expectancy, and mortality from preventable conditions) in 11 advanced industrial countries, the Commonwealth Fund concluded that the United States ranked last among them. According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. healthcare system ranks 30th in the world. Other studies reach somewhat different conclusions, but all are very unflattering to the United States, as are studies of American health. The United States, for example, has one of the world's worst cancer rates (the seventh highest), and life expectancy is declining compared to other nations. An article in the Washington Post in late 2013 reported that the United States ranked 26th among nations in life expectancy, and that the average American lifespan had fallen a year behind the international average.

What about the environment? Specialists at Yale University have developed a highly sophisticated Environmental Performance Index to examine the behavior of nations. In the area of protection of human health from environmental harm, their 2014 index placed the United States 35th in health impacts, 36th in water and sanitation, and 38th in air quality. In the other area studied — protection of ecosystems — the United States ranked 32nd in water resources, 49th in climate and energy, 86th in biodiversity and habitat, 96th in fisheries, 107th in forests, and 109th in agriculture.

These and other areas of interest are dealt with by the Social Progress Index, which was developed by Michael Porter, an eminent professor of business (and a Republican) at Harvard. According to Porter and his team, in 2014 the United States ranked 23rd in access to information and communications, 24th in nutrition and basic medical care, 31st in personal safety, 34th in water and sanitation, 39th in access to basic knowledge, 69th in ecosystem sustainability, and 70th in health and wellness.

The widespread extent of poverty, especially among children, remains a disgrace in one of the world's wealthiest nations. A 2013 report by the United Nations Children's Fund noted that, of the 35 economically advanced countries that had been studied, only Romania had a higher percentage of children living in poverty than did the United States.

Of course, the United States is not locked into these dismal rankings and the sad situation they reveal about the health, education and welfare of its citizens. It could do much better if its vast wealth, resources and technology were employed differently than they are at present.

Ultimately, it's a matter of priorities. When most U.S. government discretionary spending goes for war and preparations for war, it should come as no surprise that the United States emerges No. 1 among nations in its capacity for violence and falls far behind other nations in providing for the well-being of its people.

Americans might want to keep this in mind as their nation embarks upon yet another costly military crusade.

Lawrence Wittner (http://lawrenceswittner.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany.

The Wrong Priorities: Shifting Spending on Violence

David J. Ragland

In the lead-up to the grand jury outcome in the Michael Brown murder, the St. Louis and Ferguson-area police have ramped up their preparation – with stockpiles of more weapons and rhetoric that contributes to the public frenzy.

While I understand the need for security, does the narrow-minded focus on military and weapons actually make us more secure? Human security and peace economists understand that increased weaponization makes us more insecure.

Researchers for some time now have been able to understand how freedom from violence and the threat of violence, community-based economic development, authentic democratic processes and transparency increase human security. Violence and security have often been linked; human security research suggests they are mutually exclusive. Choosing violence to attain security precludes that very security for anyone who critiques violence, as thousands have learned in Ferguson. Clanging claims that we live in a great democracy that protects everyone's rights sound awfully hollow to an unarmed protestor who has just been injured and arrested by a jack-up cop strapped with an official lethal sidearm and a legal system that affords him every benefit of every doubt.

Democracy is not just a system of voting but an approach to governing that recognizes obstacles to participation and development, and listens, trying to hear what communities need. It is not ever envisioned as a system where the majority can vote itself immunity and vote the minority vulnerable to brutality committed by agents of the state. That sort of system is a false democracy. We want a real one.

Communities don't want handouts – people want to work to determine their own futures. But many young people question the very concept of future. In the immediate aftermath of the murder of unarmed Michael Brown last August, St. Louis City police gunned down another African American youth, Kejeme Powell, across the street from my parents' home. He had a little knife and was simply depressed and told the police, "Shoot me." They were exceedingly unprofessional and lacking even a whit of compassion as they did just that – at least six shots each. Where is the hope?

The current state of affairs concerning the outcome of the grand jury is extremely disconcerting, contributing to an increased sense of insecurity. Governor Nixon needs to appoint an independent prosecutor to avoid the perception of injustice. A real involvement of the community in plans for any grand jury outcome as hands up united suggested, or focusing on all of the positive efforts the community in Ferguson and beyond are doing to teach nonviolence would be actions that ease the air of panic of the entire region.

People of color in the U.S., in general, don't trust the legal system to bring justice. Fixing that might seem like a daunting task, but democratic theorists point out that even the smallest communities must have their needs addressed if we as a society are to maintain the promise of democracy. The Tea Party movement illustrates how the needs of a few should be given serious attention in addressing public policy.

The lack of real understanding of the protestors, beyond the sense that they are a nuisance, is part of the continuing failure of local and national officials. Their response continues to point out the deep racial divide and necessity of deep conversation and action. For instance, there was a demonstration for second amendment rights in downtown St. Louis in October where demonstrators carried guns openly. Some had three or four weapons including automatic assault weapons. This gathering of an all-white crowd was not met with riot gear, but only a few police with luminescent vests. In San Francisco, exuberant Giants fans set fires broke windows and destroyed property. While some police arrested some – where was the rhetoric around violent whites or even the call for the national guard? Fans were excited, expressing joy, although a bit much, but Whites are allowed to be angry, express emotions. But don't protestors, who are rightly angered over police killings of Blacks, have the same humanity to express their frustration?

I reiterate the need for dialogue, for listening to people's truth so they can move forward. This is not just desirable, but actually required for reconciliation. If that is not what our society is about, then there needs to be a conversation about who we really are as Americans. But as it stands, the assertion by our elected leadership is that this is a democratic nation concerned with all of its citizens. My message to government officials is that all of the preparation for the violence following the grand jury; the cost of increased overtime for police, money spent on weapons and security with the threat of violence does not provide authentic security, but instead exacerbates the root causes of the protests-the inattention to the dignity of already marginalized. Governor Nixon, you and Ferguson area officials are bracing for a storm you helped to create.

Dr. David Ragland is from North St. Louis, MO, writes for PeaceVoice, and is a Visiting Professor of Education at Bucknell University.

Letter: President Presents Face of Those Affected by Immigration Reform

Ruben Macareno

The President put us all before a mirror to ask ourselves who are we as a nation, as a people?

He explained that the issue is bigger than immigration and this couldn't be more true. Are we as Americans willing to reach out to those that have been here for years and in the large part pick our agricultural fields, take care of our children, clean our yards and homes, work in our kitchens or work in factories or turn them away? He presented a face of those affected and that was important to do. Recognizing that many of the undocumented immigrants want to be part of this country and not take away from it but contribute to it. I applaud the President's action. I look forward to Congress to work with the President on a more permanent solution.

Ruben Macareno is the Chairman of Tulare County Democratic Party.

Columns & Letters

Online Comments

Comment at ourvalleyvoice.com or fb.me/ourvalleyvoice

"This article is not surprising to me at all. It makes me sick how corrupt Tulare County really is. So much information has been coming out about the county, such as the sheriffs dept and the DA's office. It appears these employees, Jimenez and Grenseman, are exemplary and what a loss it was when they were unjustly fired to the people of Tulare County. This horrible "supervisor" and (blow job queen) co worker that harassed these employees Jimenez and Grenseman, should be arrested just like her husband was for arson. It seem as though the plaintiffs were a positive influence to the shelter and this is what is needed to save these poor little animals and give them a chance to be adopted out instead of killing them so quickly. The (blow job queen) needs to think of the animals within the shelter instead of the next blow job she gonna give. Someone needs to clean out the bad apples in all the Tulare county offices such as the shelter, the sheriffs dept and the district attorneys office. Unfortunately after the clean out, all the office would be closed due to lack of staff because it seems we have more corrupt Tulare county employees then we have honest employees. I have to give a lot of praise to the law office of Melo and Sarsfield because they seem to be starting the well needed cleaning out Tulare County crook employees and seem to be for the better of Tulare County in general. I did a little investigating myself and found this law firm just won another law suit against the Sheriffs Dept in Tulare County regarding discrimination and harassment allegations which were deemed to be true. The interim sheriff needs to be "let go" as well. He is so corrupt and to many people are to far up his butt to see. The animal shelter has a big fight to fight if their going against this law firm. The shelter deserves everything their going to get! These two plaintiffs are doing the right thing coming for. I applaud them and stand behind them fully. Good for you Jimenez and Grenseman!"

— ***Charlie Fletcher**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"It sounds like Lutz and his HHSA gang were running a puppy Auschwitz and brothel. No doubt they will all get raises this year from Phil and the boys."

— ***Clay F. Peters**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Why don't you put money where your mouth is and sponser some animals so they don't have to be euthanized!"

— ***Anonymous**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"The shelter is better off without these two. I know that for a FACT!! Julia would rather go shopping than call animal rescues. Yes, Paul is a decorated Veteran but that negates the fact that he played favorites and was a crappy boss. Get your facts right before you Judge people!!!"

— ***Anonymous**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"This is without a doubt a smear article considering the source I think Catherine Doe is the one in fact giving blowjobs In cars..."

— ***Chris Baca**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"The source was a legal brief prepared on behalf of the plaintiffs by their attorneys, and will be a public document once filed."

— ***Editor**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Exactly, it was prepared by Julia and Pauls attorney. If anything they owe the county money for not doing their jobs like they were hired to do. The only victim here is the animals that died because Julia decided to shopping and Paul just wanted to make Julia happy. I hope the county countersues theses Idiots."

— ***Anonymous**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Are any of us shocked by some of these bizarre reports? These rumors have been swirling for years. It looks as if Lutz is embroiled in a snow balling sex scandal leaving many to ask, just who is in charge."

— ***Robert S Scranton III**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"As for myself, and no one has to agree with me, but the Valley Voice is the only source of the most honest journalism I continue to read. The Valley Voice reports the news and leaves it up to the readers to do their own research. I have never read an article where they have based their personal opinion. This is true journalism. The Valley Voice does not select, reject, or supports allegations, rumors, or accusations, it simply reports them. To the Valley Voice, you just keep doing what you do best, REPORT THE NEWS, you're doing a great job. I would love to see a weekly subcription."

— ***John Duran**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Shame on Tulare County. An animal shelter shouldn't be a gallows."

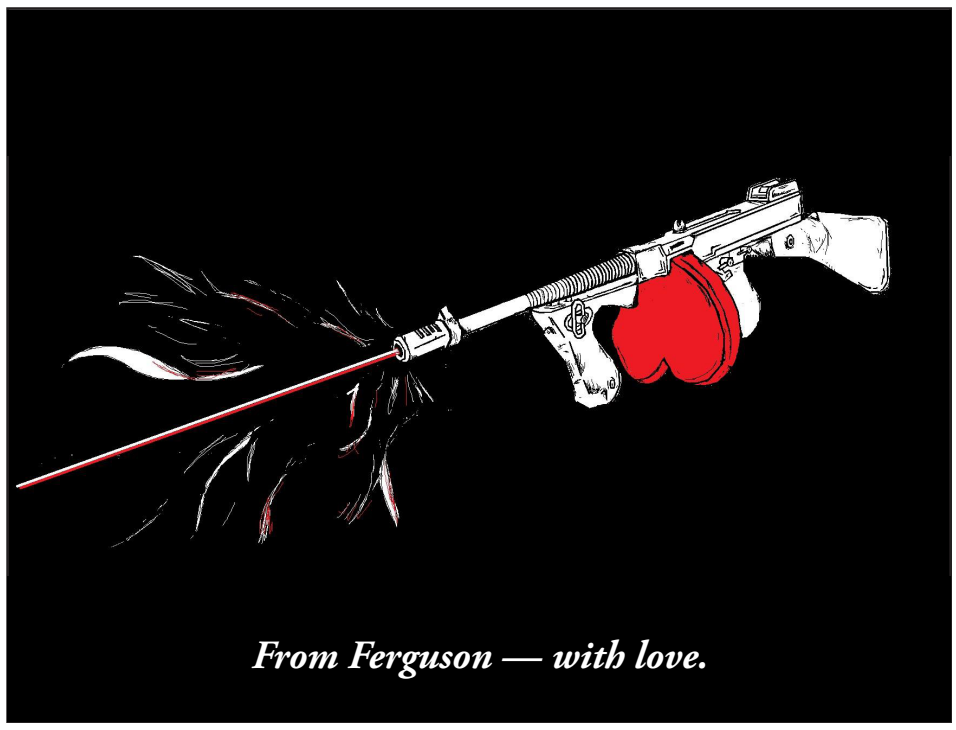
— ***Dog Lover**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"I don't understand people. They want to complain but not help fix the problem. Tulare county Animal Control follows the same protocol as does the SPCA. You don't like animals being euthanized then volunteer to foster or help contact rescues. Animal overpopulation is a problem that the public has a problem addressing. As far as this article, it's a bunch of garbage. Julia Jimenez and Paul Grensmen are trying to take more money from Tulare County. They were paid to sit on their rear ends but ultimately were let go because they didn't do their jobs. Don't pat them anymore money!!!"

— ***Cooper Jim**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

Black Tie

Alex Oldenbourg



Veteran's Corner

Veterans Outreach

Joe Wright

In an effort to assist veterans and their dependents in receiving state and federal veterans benefits that they may be eligible for, our office will make home visits. These home visits are designed for those that cannot travel to our office. We can assist with the appropriate paperwork and file a claim for benefits. We also work with family members who are trying to assist a veteran or dependent in obtaining benefits. We can also assist with transportation arrangements to the Veterans Administration hospital in Fresno. We coordinate with KART, who provides transportation to and from the hospital several times a week.

Our office also does speaking engagements. We can come to your facility and speak about both state and federal veteran's benefits. We will speak to community service organizations, NAS Lemoore commands, groups of veterans, or any group that has an interest in veteran's benefits. Our talks normally last about 30 minutes but can be tailored to fit your needs. We can also be available to answer questions about specific veteran's issues. To inquire about a home visit, or to setup a speaking engagement, please contact our office.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office issues Veteran ID cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Joe Wright if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email.

There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd., Hanford, CA 93230; call 852-2669; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.

"This is bush league reporting It is sad and pathetic that clearly this article is out to make two people look good in the court of public opinion. The is without a doubt a article written by Juila or Pauls family or friends to make them look like heros. the valley voice has become the Inquirer of news reporting"

— ***Thomas**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"The article strictly reports the contents of a brief prepared by the plaintiffs' attorneys, and it is not the author's intention to paint the plaintiffs in any kind of light at all. In fact, they were unknown to the author before the article was written. When the county responds, the *Valley Voice* will report on that–and will leave its readers to their own opinions."

— ***Editor**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"I hope said "Bj queen" sues Julia Jimenez and the *Valley Voice* for libel. Everything out of her mouth is lies!"

— ***Anonymous**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Said "BJ Queen" was not named. Feel free."

— ***Editor**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"Is "BJ Queen" Appropriate for a newspaper Article? what happened to unbiased reporting"

— ***Mark**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

"BJ Queen" did not appear in the article. This is unbiased reporting. As you must be aware, the plaintiffs will look less than rosy when the county responds. The *Valley Voice* will cover this, too."

— ***Editor**, on **Tulare County Animal Control Sued***

Sequoia Riverlands Trust Prepares to Open Blue Oak Ranch Preserve

Staff Reports

A new preserve for public enjoyment is in the works for Central California's southern Sierra foothills.

Blue Oak Ranch is a 1,147-acre working ranch adjacent to Scicon near Springville that uses – among other conservation approaches – sustainable cattle ranching practices. It is one of six Central California preserves owned and managed by Sequoia Riverlands Trust, which also operates Kaweah Oaks Preserve near Exeter.

"SRT hopes that Blue Oak Ranch will become a great educational and recreational asset to southeast Tulare County, as well as an example of how sustainable conservation practices can benefit a working cattle ranch," said Aaron Collins, SRT director of communications and community relations. He said that plans for the ranch also include residential caretakers, interpretive signage and other features to help the public learn about the ranch's Blue Oak woodland.

"The preserve's setting below Dennison Peak is breathtaking and offers nature lovers and photographers a place to roam," Collins added.

In preparation for opening Blue Oak Ranch sometime in 2015, Sequoia Riverlands Trust is collaborating with Porterville Unified School District's Environmental Sciences Academy (ESA), part of its Pathways approach to career-based learning. ESA students helped plan a preview day on November 22, where they designed and mapped trails, led interpretive tours, and enjoyed equestrian and archery demonstrations, showing the many possible uses of the preserve, which also include hiking, biking and other recreational and educational uses.

SRT has a number of other interests in the Springville area, including conservation easement partnerships at Circle J Ranch and River Ridge Ranch.

Blue Oak Ranch Preserve

Blue Oak Ranch Preserve

Blue Oak Ranch Preserve Preview day was held on November 22.

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VALLEY VOICE

Valley Scene

Sons of the San Joaquin Return to Visalia Fox for Holiday Concert

Staff Reports

The Sons of the San Joaquin will return to the Visalia Fox Theater for an afternoon of Christmas and Holiday favorites at 3pm on Saturday, December 13.

The Sons of the San Joaquin

The Sons are known for their upbeat, airtight three-part harmony and original cowboy material, written by Jack Hannah. The ensemble today is Jack and his brother Joe Hannah, and Joe's son Lon.

The Sons' sound first took shape in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, where the Hannah family had moved from Depression-era Missouri. They have been performing and recording since 1989 and have won many awards, including multiple awards for Traditional Duo/Group from the Western Music Association. They were inducted into the Western Music Association's Hall of Fame in 2006.

Tickets for the popular Christmas tradition are $19-$23 and are available online at www.fox-visalia.org or by calling 625-1369.

The V Town Dames battle to beat Sacramento's Sacred City Derby Girls. The V Town Dames (in red and black), include Jessica Loya, Amber Clark, Chrissy Buma and Melissa Hawkins. Photo by David Costa.

Tachi Palace to Present Lee Greenwood and Crystal Gayle on December 11

Staff Reports

Lee Greenwood and Crystal Gayle will bring their Christmas Show to Tachi Palace in Lemoore on Thursday, December 11.

Lee Greenwood

Greenwood has more than 30 albums to his credit. His #1 songs and other charting singles include: "It Turns Me Inside Out," "Ring on Her Finger, Time on Her Hands," "She's Lyin," "I Don't Mind the Thorns if You're the Rose," "Dixie Road" and "Somebody's Gonna Love You."

Greenwood has won numerous industry awards including: Male Vocalist of the year for the Academy of Country Music in 1983, two Male Vocalist of the Year awards from the Country Music Association, and a Grammy for Top Male Vocal Performance in 1985 for "I.O.U." He also won CMA Song of the Year in 1985 for writing "God Bless the USA," voted the most recognizable patriotic song in America.

Gayle's first #1 was "I'll Get Over You," which was followed two years later by another chart-topper, "You Never Miss A Real Good Thing (Till He Says Goodbye)." In 1977, she became a household name when "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" perched atop the country charts for four weeks and climbed the pop charts in America and around the world.

Crystal Gayle

Gayle won back-to-back female vocalist honors from the Academy of Country Music in 1976 and 1977 and from the Country Music Association in 1977 and 1978.

Tickets for the 7:30pm show are $35, $45 and $65. For more information, visit www.tachipalace.com/entertainment.php.

The Lemoore Chamber of Commerce's Annual Christmas Parade is scheduled for 6pm Saturday, December 6, along D Street between Follett and Hill streets in Downtown Lemoore.

Roller Derby Gains Popularity in Valley

Nancy Vigran

They come from all walks of life – teachers and nurses, military and stay-at-home moms, accountants and beauticians. They range in age from their late teens to mid-forties. They all have one thing in common – their physical and mental dedication to the sport of roller derby.

"My family and friends (who are not in the sport), get tired of hearing about roller derby," said Tulare resident, Laura Anderson, 24.

Anderson joined the V-Town Derby Dames and Darlings a year ago, when she found out about the club on Facebook. They were about to have their annual free derby clinic; she attended, and got hooked.

"I've been addicted to it ever since," Anderson said. "It's not something people kind of do, it's all or nothing.

"You don't use a bat, ball or a racquet; you use your body," she said. "It's what you can do with your body. It's a very well-rounded sport."

Naval Petty Officer Second Class Viridiana Trevino, 27, joined the V-Town club a couple of months ago. Trevino, based at the Lemoore Naval Air Station, had long been interested in the sport, as she is with most sports. She attended a party at Roller Towne in Visalia and saw the V-Town Darlings during a home game. She decided to go ahead and join.

"I figured this was cheaper than therapy," Trevino said, with a smile on her face.

Despite the drive to Visalia, she tries to attend the three weekly night practices, when her duties allow.

V-TOWN continued on **25 »**

Symphony Presents Annual Holiday Concert

Donna Orozco

The Tulare County Symphony's annual Holiday concert on Saturday, December 20 is designed to be family-friendly. It's really a pops concert filled with traditional Holiday tunes such as "Sleigh Ride," "Little Drummer Boy" and the "Nutcracker Suite" (played Les Brown style).

The concert will be performed twice—at 3pm and 7:30pm. The matinee will feature a large children's choir singing "My Christmas Tree" from "Home Alone 2." The evening performance will feature the El Diamante High School choir singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" and "O Holy Night."

Local singers will also perform Holiday favorites.

Several pieces have become an annual tradition, such as "Polar Express" and "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas," which is always sung by a young member of Encore Theatre's Kids Company.

The evening concert will also feature a sing-along of the "Hallelujah Chorus." All singers who know the piece are invited to bring their music and join the orchestra on stage.

Please note that the date has changed from what was announced in the season brochure.

Tickets are $30 to $39.50 at the symphony office, 208 W. Main St., Suite D, Visalia, downstairs in Montgomery Square. Student prices are $10. Tickets are also available at 732-8600 and at www.tularecountysymphony.com.

Tulare County Symphony Takes Music to Underserved Youth

Donna Orozco

As the bus drew up to the Visalia Fox Theatre on symphony night, excited students from Pixley School looked up at the lighted marquee and couldn't repress their excitement about the upcoming concert. Most had never been to a big theater or attended a concert before.

The students had been invited to the concert as part of the Tulare County Symphony's plan to expose more youth to music and the many benefits it brings.

This season, new executive director Juliette de Campos decided to set aside tickets for schools from underserved rural areas. She will invite a different school to each concert and has received support from the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and use of the LOOP bus.

Symphony violinist and retired music teacher Janet Grizzell went to the school the week of the concert to give some background on the music and composers and also explained proper dress and etiquette. Just before the concert, music director Bruce Kiesling visited the students in their seats in the Fox balcony, introduced himself, and talked about what the students could expect that evening.

Symphony Music Director Bruce Kiesling talks with Pixley students.

Music Education

For 55 years, the Tulare County Symphony has presented youth concerts for young students. This October, over 8,700 students were introduced to classical music and instruments in Visalia, Tulare and Porterville. In the last few years, the orchestra and Symphony League have created several junior string and orchestra programs. In addition, each year the league gives out over 80 string scholarships so students can have private lessons.

But now the symphony wants to go several steps further. For the last five years, Kiesling was director of YOLA, Youth Orchestras of Los Angeles, which is sponsored by the L.A. Philharmonic. The program is just for underserved, low-income children who would not have access to playing an instrument without the program.

"That stunning program was a powerful engine of change for many young musicians and it is definitely my hope that we can have similar successes with students in Tulare County," said Kiesling.

Toward that end, the symphony is working with rural schools and Pro Youth Heart to find grants and other funding to bring similar music programs to schools that don't have the resources for music programs.

Partnership with Pro Youth Heart

The timing couldn't have been better when Pro Youth Heart Executive Director Daryn Davis came to the symphony with a dream of starting a music program in one of Pro Youth Heart's neediest after-school programs.

"We wanted a mentoring and teaching model," said Davis. "We know that such a program builds leadership skills whether the child continues to play an instrument or not."

She and de Campos are now working on a pilot program to find funds for instruments and an instructor in the spring at Woodville School, a school with few resources that serves 220 Pro Youth Heart children, primarily from farm worker families.

Rural Outreach

Realizing that many schools do not have the funds or transportation to attend the youth concerts, and that it would be difficult to fund music teachers in these schools, the symphony is working on a rural outreach program that would create a classroom toolkit that non-music teachers could easily incorporate into their curriculum. Another goal is to take small ensembles or string quartets to these schools, where they could play for the entire student body at an assembly.

The importance of music education is considerable. A number of recent studies confirm this. In the award-winning Harmony Project, underserved children in L.A. receive free instruments and instruction if they promise to stay in school. The study is finding that music instruction not only improves children's communication skills, attention and memory, but that it may even close the academic gap between rich and poor students.

"The goal is not merely musical skills, but *life skills*," said Kiesling. "Playing in a musical ensemble is a perfect metaphor for cooperation and participation in a group dynamic with different responsibilities around a shared goal."

Two other five-year studies are showing a change in the kids who are studying music. Making music appears to have lasting effects on both brain structure and brain function. Playing a piece of music involves the auditory, visual, motor and emotional centers of the brain. Brain scans reveal that there is more activity in the brain during a musical performance than there is during most other activities.

How to Help

"We know music changes lives and we want to share this gift with communities where it is needed the most," said de Campos, who has set up a donation site, www.tularecountysymphony.com/education.

"Funding for the arts in schools has dwindled in recent years, and pressure on us to expand our programs and serve more youth is high," she said. "We can only do this with increased financial support from the community. We are reaching out and asking service clubs, businesses and community-minded folks to invest in helping us grow these programs."

Lindsay Community Theater to Present Musical Variety Show

Staff Reports

The Lindsay Community Theater will present Jingle Ball 2014 on Saturday, December 13, at 7:30pm. Jingle Ball 2014 is a musical variety Christmas show for all ages, starring some of Tulare County's most talented young entertainers.

Anahy Rangel is a member of the COS Chamber Choir and a vocal performance major. She is an alumnus of the LHS choir and is known for her performances of the national anthem at school events.

Michelle Bautista has performed on the Lindsay stage in musicals such as "West Side Story" and has perfomed the national anthem at Lindsay High School events.

Lauren Fonseca is well known at both the Lindsay Theater and the Encore Theater in Tulare. She is an elementary school teacher and a dance teacher. She landed the role of Janette in the "Rocky Horror Show" in 2012.

Nelson Guiza, currently part of the COS Artistic Company, is studying musical theatre and is performing on the COS stage. Guiza has performed on the Lindsay stage, with lead roles in musicals such as "Beauty and the Beast," "Grease" and "The Sound of Music."

Felipe Garcia, a working recording artist originally from Mexico, is now living in the U.S. pursuing a career in music. He was part of a televised singing competition in Mexico City.

Nicole Conway is also a member of the COS Artistic Company who has been performing since a young age and now performs on the COS stage.

These artists will be performing songs like "Deck the Rooftop," "Noel," "We Need a Little Christmas," "Do You Hear What I Hear?" "Merry Christmas," "All I Want for Christmas is You," "Last Christmas" and "Baby It's Cold Outside." Felipe Garcia will lead a Spanish Christmas sing-a-long.

Admission is $10 for adults and $5 for students. Tickets are available at lindsaycommunitytheater.com and at the door.

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Memorial wreath placed at the base of the General Grant Tree. (NPS photo)

'Trek to the Tree' Ceremony at Kings Canyon Planned for December 14

Staff Reports

The 89th Trek to the Nation's Christmas Tree ceremony will be held on Sunday, December 14, from 2:30-3:30pm at Kings Canyon National Park. The event, sponsored by the Sanger District Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the National Park Service, will include the Jubilation Singers, Sanger High School Choir, Fresno Tuba Christmas Ensemble and a non-denominational Holiday message.

During the ceremony, a National Park Service representative will speak about the General Grant Tree's role as a national shrine in memory of the men and women of the Armed Forces who have served, fought and died to keep America free. A memorial wreath will be placed at the base of the tree.

The ceremony will be held a quarter-mile from the nearest parking lot. Given limited parking at the grove, a free shuttle service will be available from the Kings Canyon Visitor Center parking area to the Grant Tree Trail. Allow an extra 30 minutes to use this in-park shuttle service.

Access through the entrance to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will be free that day to allow park visitors to experience the celebration of the Nation's Christmas Tree.

For detailed directions, visit www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/driving-directions.htm. Visitors are strongly advised to check road/weather conditions in advance and/or be prepared for bad weather. Walking surfaces may be slippery and snowy. Travelers should provide additional time to accommodate for weather conditions. Drivers must bring and be prepared to use tire chains or cables, if required. For weather and road condition information, call 565-3341 and press 1.

For more information about Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, visit www.nps.gov/seki or call 565-3341.

London Christmas Parade Planned for December 16

The 20th Annual London Christmas Parade, featuring Grand Marshal Rob Isquierdo Jr., Library For London founder, and the Dinuba High School Marching band, will be held on Tuesday, December 16.

This year's participants also include United Pentecostal, Kings River Band, Kings River Teachers, Miss Tulare County Teen, Assemblyman-elect Devon Mathis, the Dinuba Historical Society, Biolas Veterans Color Guard, Washington Junior High Band, Selma Lions Club, Road Hogz, Cruising for Jesus and London Preschool.

The London Christmas Parade starts on Avenue 378, turning left at Kate Road, passing the grandstand (at LCAPS Park/Thrift Store, 37835 Kate Road), before making a left on Avenue 380, another left on Road 58, a right on Avenue 378 and ending at London Community Center, 5728 Avenue 378, London.

For more information, call 818-482-8140.

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Sound N Vision to Present Lou Umbra, Talk in Tongues on December 20

Staff Reports

Lou Umbra and Talk in Tongues will perform at Sound N Vision's December 20th show at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St. in Visalia.

Omotola of Lou Umbra

Talk In Tongues

Lou Umbra is Fresno's newest music project. The indie-soul group, led by Omotola, site Aretha Franklin, Florence & the Machine, Polica, TV on the Radio, Kitten, Jeff Buckley, Hayley Williams and Justin Vernon as chief influences.

Los Angeles foursome Talk In Tongues sound equal parts Tame Impala and MGMT. Their stellar debut single, "Still Don't Seem To Care," recently appeared online and has gained the band a lot of attention. The group is full of songwriters who share limitless drive and direction and an unexpected common ground in several generations of psychedelic music, from the '60s Pink Floyd and 13th Floor Elevators through the unstoppable Creation Records roster in the '90s.

Tickets for the 21+ 8pm show are $5 and available at Ticketweb.com.

Katy Moffatt to Perform at Mavericks Coffee House

Staff Reports

Mavericks Coffee House will present a 7pm performance by Katy Moffatt on Saturday, December 13.

Katy Moffatt

Moffatt has opened shows for a variety of performers, from Muddy Waters to the Everly Brothers. She appeared in four films including the cult classic "Billy Jack," when she was in her teens. She has 17 albums to her credit, which includes the classic *Cowboy Girl*, a western music CD produced by David Wilkie of Cowboy Celtic fame.

For tickets ($24) or more information, call Mavericks at 624-1400, or stop by at 238 E. Caldwell Avenue, Visalia.

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Brandon-Mitchell Gallery Spotlights 29 Local Artists

Donna Orozco

Each November and December, the Brandon-Mitchell Gallery hosts a Member Show, inviting members and friends to submit their artwork for display. This year, 29 artists answered the call, and the show boasts 40 pieces – everything from traditional paintings, photos and pottery to fiber art, stained glass and some unusual pieces made out of driftwood.

The center will host a reception for the artists during the First Friday art walk on December 5 from 5:30-8pm.

Here are just a few artists to look for:

• Chuck "Ed" Berry is colorblind but says it really doesn't affect his artwork. A former graphic artist, Chuck has three pieces in the show. All are all of animals, a subject he loves. Be sure to look closely at "Cow's Nose" because he has incorporated a lot of little hidden creatures in the color pencil drawing.

• Joan Seibel's ceramic birds look real. At first glance, you might think they really have feathers, but they're entirely made of clay. She sculpts the birds and then cuts the head off. She has to do that to hollow out the head. She says if clay is too solid, it blows up when fired. She reattaches the head, adds wings, and then starts carving out the feathers.

"Lion" by Chuck Berry.

• David L. Smith uses his architectural skills to create intricate drawings. He takes a picture of his subject, puts mylar over it and uses a technical pencil and many hours to draw fine lines to create detailed works of art. For this show, he has included drawings of scenes he saw on a trip down the Rhine River.

• Richard Blakemore took a small manzanita twig and carefully pealed off the bark to reveal beautiful colors underneath.

• Larry Ficken's large piece of driftwood suggested faces to him. He mounted it on an 80-year-old nut bolt so it would stand erect and could be seen from all sides.

• P. Kay Wood's macro photographs are all taken with a cell phone. One is a beautiful picture of feathers that she admits is of road kill. She went to pull a dead vulture out of the road, saw how beautiful the feathers were, and took a picture!

• Beverly Sigo created a large fiber art hanging of the Spiritual Awareness logo for the Autumn's Opulence fundraiser in October and has it on display.

"Hawk" by Joan Seibel

• "Friends" is an oil painting by Marie Logan, created at the request of old friends. The design is a compilation of several photos taken on trips with the friends and a "healthy dose of I just made up some parts to complete the composition."

Finally, you won't want to miss a large piece by Joan Hyde entitled "I Want Cake." It's a series of cat paintings, each explaining why it wants cake in each of nine spiritual traditions. It's darling and very clever. You'll get your laugh for the day.

The Brandon-Mitchell Gallery is located at the Spiritual Awareness Center, 117 S. Locust St. in Visalia, and open 5:30-8pm on the first Friday of each month and by appointment. For more information, call 625-2441.

The Road to Christmas Set to Surprise

The Road to Christmas is a multi-venue Christmas festival with live concerts, plenty of food, and many interactive opportunities to celebrate with family and friends.

The event will kick-off the holiday season at The Road Church, 1021 S. Burke St. in Visalia on Friday, December 12 at 6:15pm, and December 13 at 4pm, and will do so through the music and the creativity of the Road Church Worship Band, led by Jonathan Hendrickson, who will be joined by the Gospel Whiskey Runners.

The Road to Christmas will feature an outdoor and indoor Christmas festival with two concerts, three styles of music, four styles of food, a petting zoo nativity area, cookie decorating, a family picture area, snow machines and worship for the whole family.

It is designed for the whole community to experience the excitement and meaning of Christmas in a multi-venue setting that is busting at the seams with warmth, fun, tradition and friends. Adult tickets are $10 with children $5 dollars, and are available at the Road Church and at www.theroadvisalia.com.

"We're looking to present something that is truly unique and memorable," explained John Lloyd, the lead pastor of the Road Church and founder of the relationship-based Iron Men's Ministries.

"The whole church family is stepping up to impact the whole community in a festive setting that will surprise everyone."

Over the years, people have enjoyed the quality of a Pastor Lloyd-led event, from the 4,000+ Big Man's Breakfast to the Iron Men's Retreat at Hume Lake, attended by over 700 men from all parts of the state. For more information, contact Linda at 747-6753 or linda@theroadvisalia.com.

Western Music Association Honors Tulare County Music Industry Professionals

The Western Music Association honored local members of the music industry at its Awards of Excellence presentations last month in Albuquerque.

Gary E. Brown, who hosts the concerts at Mavericks Coffee House in Visalia, and is the founder of the Monterey Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival, received the prestigious Pioneer Trail Award. The Hall of Fame of the WMA presents the award "to honor specific initiatives and unique inroads created that have furthered the positive influence and exposure of Western Music and Cowboy Poetry." Brown's selection is only the seventh such award given out since the WMA's inception in 1988.

Brown was also honored as the recipient of the Curly Musgrave Silver Buckle Award, which is given to someone in the Western Music Community "who exemplifies the true cowboy spirit through their code of ethics, principles of honesty, loyalty and integrity." Brown is the fifth person to receive this award.

The Entertainer of the Award went to Dave Stamey, a resident in the county area near Orange Cove, who had won the coveted award in the past.

Former longtime Visalia resident Belinda Gail won the Western Album of the Year Award for her new CD, *Granite Mountain*. Also, Strathmore born-and-bred Juni Fisher, who has won many WMA awards, was nominated for Western Album of the Year, Song of the Year and Entertainer of the Year.

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‘Four Lenses: Four Visions’ Wraps Up 2014 at Arts Visalia

Kevin Bowman

Tulare County has some of the most beautiful landscapes one could see anywhere in California. We have the geometry and precision of the farmed lands, the rolling panoramas of the foothills, and the majesty of the High Sierras. Perhaps this is a fact taken for granted by those who live here or unrecognized by those who haven’t traveled our country roads. We so often hear such statements that they may come to feel like clichés when, in fact, they could not be more true.

Many of us will find ourselves stopping on county roadsides, grabbing our camera(phone) and trying to capture an impression of that beautiful scenery. Rarely does the picture truly capture the view. To produce a truly memorable photograph, one needs technical skill with the camera, an eye for framing an image, the patience and persistence to be in the right place at the right time, and a thought to the tactile qualities of the finished print.

To close our exhibition schedule for 2014, we have sought out a handful of artists who have an appreciation of our local landscape and the dedication necessary to create unique views of this special place. The exhibition, titled “Four Lenses: Four Visions,” features photographic works by Ralph Chojnacki, John Greening, Greg Halliwill and Jerry Smith. Using their cameras to explore the foothills and giant forest areas of Tulare County, each brings their own creative vision to the images they produce of places which will be familiar to their fellow Tulare County residents.

“View from Lewis Hill” by John Greening

Both Chojnacki and Smith’s work focus on the rolling hills in and around the Yokhol Valley area, a truly special place. Halliwill’s images capture both the grand scale and the intimate details of the Giant Forest area of Sequoia National Forest. Finally, John Greening presents some remarkable photographs taken on properties of Sequoia Riverlands Trust, an organization with which he has done a good deal of work. Through their photographs, each of these artists reveals a trait that they all share: a well-trained eye and a strong sense of composition, qualities that are crucial to any photographic image.

“Yokohl Early Spring Morning” by Jerry Smith

Also returning in December is Arts Visalia’s Annual Holiday Show & Sale, featuring handcrafted gifts and art by some of the Central Valley’s finest artists and craftsmen. Each year for the Holidays, we expand our gift shop just in time for Christmas shopping season.

Both “Four Lenses: Four Visions” and the Annual Holiday Show and Sale will be on display at Arts Visalia July December 5 through 20, with an opening reception for the public on Friday, December 5, from 6 to 8pm. During the opening reception, we hold the drawing for our holiday raffle, a chance to win one of over 20 wonderful prizes while supporting Arts Visalia. Tickets will be available during the event right up until drawing time.

Arts Visalia is located at 214 E. Oak Ave. in Visalia. For more information, call 739-0905, email artsvisalia@sbcglobal.net or visit www.artsvisalia.org.

Kevin Bowman is the director of Arts Visalia and an adjunct instructor of art at College of the Sequoias.

ART CALENDAR

Through Dec. 28 – Elements at Exeter Art Gallery – 1-4pm
The works of acrylic artist Anees Akhund from Visalia, sculptor Christy Cole from Porterville, and photographers Hye Jung Kim and John C. Radar from Hawaii will be on display at the Exeter Art Gallery, 125 B Street. The gallery is open Saturdays and Sundays.

Through Dec. 28 – 21st Annual Young Masters’ Show – 12:30-2:30pm
A countywide K-12 art exhibit will be on display at the Kings Art Center. For information, visit kingsartcenter.org.

Through Dec. 31 – Double Take Exhibit
Jeri Burzin’s exhibit of photography and mixed media will be at Michael’s Jewelry, 316 W. Main St., Visalia. For information, visit jeriburzin.com.

Through Dec. 31 – Visalia Visual Chronicle - 8am-5pm
Art from various artists that captures the culture of Visalia is on display at Provost and Pritchard, 130 N. Garden, Visalia. The gallery is open Monday-Friday. For information, call 636-1166.

Through Dec. 31 – Arts Consortium Membership Exhibition
The Arts Consortium is holding its first membership exhibition at the Visalia Convention Center. Nearly 40 works of art are included. For information, visit artsconsortium.org.

Through Jan. 3 – Paintings by Nadi Spencer
Acrylics and watercolors by Nadi Spencer of Three Rivers are on display at the Tulare Historical Museum, 444 W. Tulare. The museum is open Thursday through Saturday. For information, visit tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Through Jan. 3 – Annual Winter Show
An exhibit featuring works never before shown at the Kings County Art League will be held at the Marcellus Gallery of the Kings Art Center, 605 N. Douty St., Hanford. For information, call 584-1065.

Through Jan. 18 – Celebration Exhibit
Main Gallery Artists Betty Berk, Toni Best, Jeri Burzin, Joy Collier, Elsah Cort, Laurie Gorman, Beckie Nava, Deborah Nolan, Lynn Ramires, Deanna Saldana and Ginny Wilson are featured at Café 225. The public is invited to the reception Sunday, Nov. 23, 2-5pm. For more information, visit www.maingalleryvisalia.com or call 967-8635.

Dec. 4 – Exeter’s Country Craft Fair – 9am-4pm
The 45th Annual Exeter Country Craft Fair will feature more than 60 vendors from Tulare County. Proceeds to benefit local veterans and active military men and women.

Dec. 4 – Christmas Wreath Class – 6:30-8pm
Ramblin Rose of Lemoore will offer a crafting class at 246 Heinlen St. Tickets, $60, must be purchased in advance. For information, visit facebook.com/ramblinroselemoore.

Dec. 5 – Member Show Artists’ Reception–5:30-8pm
The art of 29 artists will be featured at the Member Show at Brandon-Mitchell Gallery that runs through December. An artist reception will be held during the First Friday Art Walk. The Brandon-Mitchell Gallery is located at the Spiritual Awareness Center, 117 S. Locust St., Visalia and open on the first Friday of each month and by appointment. For information, call 625-2441.

Dec. 5-6 – Lemon Cove Holiday Bazaar
Sequoia Union’s PTC will host local artisans selling candles, soaps, jewelry and an assortment of Holiday gifts. On Dec. 5 they will be open from 1-4pm and on Dec. 6 from 9am-4pm. Santa will make an appearance on Friday afternoon. The event will be held in the Lemon Cove Memorial Building, 23958 Ave. 324.

Dec. 5-6 – The Naz Holiday Bazaar
Visalia Nazarene Church will hold a Holiday bazar at 3333 W. Caldwell, Visalia from 6:30-8:30pm Dec. 5, and from 9am-3pm on Dec. 6.

Dec. 5-Dec. 20 – Four Lenses - Four Visions – 12-5:30pm
An exhibition of photography by Ralph Chojnacki, John Greening, Greg Halliwell and Jerry Smith will be on display at Arts Visalia, 214 E. Oak Ave. The gallery is open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 12-5:30pm. For information, visit artsvisalia.org.

Dec. 5 – Porterville Art Walk – 5-8pm
On the first Friday of each month, a free self-guided tour of local artisans, galleries, art studios, museums and alternative art venues is featured. For information, visit portervilleartwalk.org.

Dec. 5 – Downtown Visalia’s First Friday – 5:30-8:30pm
On the first Friday of each month, artists and businesses throughout Downtown Visalia come together to celebrate and share their art. For more information, visit theartsconsortium.org.

Dec. 5 – Visalia Convention Center Artist Reception – 6-8pm
The Visalia Convention Center will hold an artist reception for its ongoing member show that runs through December. Artist Jeri Burzin will show her image of “Provincetown Dunes.” For information, visit jeriburzin.com.

Dec. 5 – Artist Reception – 6-8pm
The Friends and Members Art Exhibit show will host an artist reception. The exhibit, which features the works of 29 local artists, runs through December at Brandon-Mitchell Art Gallery. 117 S. Locust, Visalia.

Dec. 6 – Lemon Cove Women’s Club Bazaar – 11am
Holiday items made by local women and club members will be available at the historic Pogue Hotel. Lunch and a card party will follow. Proceeds to benefit the historic home. Tickets are $15. For reservations, call 597-1416.

Dec. 6 – Annual Holiday Craft Show - 11am-4pm
An Annual Craft show will feature Christmas items at Coalinga Plaza.

Dec. 6 – 1st Saturday – 11am-5pm
Artists of Three Rivers have joined together to create a day of food, fun and art on the first Saturday of every month featuring artists, restaurants, gift shops, galleries and more. Watch the artist paint or listen to musicians or storytellers. For information, visit 1stsaturdaytr.com.

MUSIC

Dec. 4, 11 & 18 – Tribute to Motown – 7-10pm
On Thursdays, Herb Mallory and the Crawdads are featured in our Tribute to Motown at Crawdaddys Visalia, 333 E. Main St. For information, visit CrawdaddysVisalia.com.

Dec. 4, 11 & 18 – South 65 Country Rock Band – 8pm-12:30am
South 65 will perform every Thursday night at the Republik Lounge & Nightclub, 115 N. Locust St., Visalia. For information, visit facebook.com/RepublikLoungeNightclub.

Dec. 6 – Love Note – 8pm
A CD Release Party for Love Note will be held at the Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia Tickets are $5 for this 21+ concert. For information, visit snvfoundation.org.

Dec. 10, 17 & 24 – Open Mic Night – 7:30-9:30pm
Ronnie Nix will lead open mic night at Farmer's Fury Tasting Room, 358 W. D Street, Lemoore every Wednesday evening. For information, visit farmersfurywines.com.

Dec. 11 – Crystal Gayle and Lee Greenwood Christmas Show – 7:30pm
Tickets are $35, $45 and $65 for this Christmas concert at the Tachi Palace Resort and Casino in Porterville. For information, visit at tachipalace.com.

Dec. 12 – Free Winter Concert – 7-9pm
Exeter Union High School will present a free Christmas concert in the auditorium, located at the corner of San Juan and Kaweah.

Dec. 12 – The Tumbao Band – 9:30pm
Performing at the Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia Tickets are $7 for this 21+ concert. For information, visit snvfoundation.org.

Dec. 13 – Sons of the San Joaquin Christmas Cowboy Concert– 3-5pm
The Western music trio will perform at the Visalia Fox Theater. Tickets, $19-$23, are available at foxvisalia.org.

Dec. 13 – Katy Moffatt – 7pm
Katy Moffat will perform at Mavericks Coffee House, 238 E. Caldwell Ave., Visalia. For information, visit mavericksccoffeehouse.com.

Dec. 14 – Jeremy "Elvis" Pearce – 3pm
Elvis Impersonator Jeremy Pearce will perform Christmas songs and more at The Barn Theater in Porterville. For information, visit barntheater.porterville.com.

Dec. 14 – Christmas Concert – 4 pm
Kings Symphony Orchestra brings back treasured memories of childhood and family in this Holiday concert held at Hanford High Presentation Center. For information, visit kingssymphony.org.

Dec. 14-15 – Best of Colburn – 7pm
The Best of Colburn music series presents tuba player Gabriel Sears, who will premier a new work by resident composer Ken Elias. Presented twice: Dec. 14 at 7 pm at Community Presbyterian Church, 43410 Sierra Dr., Three Rivers; and Dec. 15 at 5 pm at Main Street Theatre, 307 E. Main, Visalia. For information, visit threeriversperformingarts.org.

Dec. 18 – Tulare Community Band Winter Concert – 7:30pm
Holiday music, marches, concert music and a "Tribute to the Military" finale will be featured at a free concert at the Tulare Community Auditorium, 755 E. Tulare Ave. For information, call 901-3773.

Dec. 19 – The Chop Tops – 9:30pm
The Chop Tops, Motel Drive, DeeJay Savage Salvador perform the Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia Tickets are $10 for this 21+ concert. For information, visit snvfoundation.org.

Dec. 20 – TCSO Holiday Pops – 3 & 7:30pm
The Tulare County Symphony Orchestra will present its Holiday show featuring Winter, Christmas and Hanukkah music with more than 200 performers showcasing the talent throughout the county. For information, visit tularecountysymphony.com.

Dec. 20 – Lou Umbra – 8-10pm
SNV Foundation presents Lou Umbra and Talk in Tongues at the Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia Tickets are $5 for this 21+ concert. For information, visit snvfoundation.org.

Dec. 26 – Karaoke – 6:30-8:30pm
Every Third Friday each month, Karaoke is featured at 210 Cafe. For information, call 739-9009.

Dec. 30 – Good Medicine – 7pm
Good Medicine performs at St. Mary's Church, 608 N. Church St., Visalia.

Jan. 10 – TCSO The Russia House – 7:30pm
Shostakovich: Piano Concerto No. 2 featuring pianist Steven Lin will be featured at Tulare County Symphony Orchestra performance "the Russia House." The evening closes with "Pictures at an Exhibition." TCSO performs at the Visalia Fox Theatre. For information, visit foxvisalia.org.

Jan. 10 – Haunted Summer – 8-10pm
Haunted Summer and Burning Bridges will be featured at the early show at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main Street, Visalia. Tickets for the 21+ concert are $5.

Jan. 17 – Mike Beck – 7pm
Mike Beck will perform at Mavericks Coffee House, 238 E. Caldwell, Visalia. For information, visit mavericksccoffeehouse.com.

Feb. 14 – Avett Brothers in Concert – 8pm
The Avett Brothers will be returning to the Visalia Fox Theater on Valentine's Day. Tickets available by calling 625-1369.

Feb. 15 – Jason Eady – 8pm
Singer-Songwriter Jason Eady performs at the Front Porch House, 17612 Lacey Blvd., Lemoore. Tickets are $15.

Feb. 21 – Great Movies/Great Music – 7:30pm
Tulare County Symphony Orchestra's film series continues with music from spy films from James Bonds to Mission Impossible. The concert will be held at the Visalia Fox Theatre. For information, visit tularecountysymphony.com.

March 7 – Eroica – 7:30pm
Old and new meet in this Tulare County Symphony Orchestra concert with Beethoven's "Eroica" combined with today's hottest living composers like Tan Dan's "You Tube Symphony." The concert will be held at the Visalia Fox Theatre. For information, visit tularecountysymphony.com.

EVENTS

Through Dec. 5 - Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Friends of Tulare County Toy Drive
Give a child a gift meant just for them by donating by Dec. 5. To sign up and view drop-off locations, visit tinyurl.com/kz7ts7d.

Through-Dec. 31 – Meet Me On Mars - Fit Fest 4 Hunger
A worldwide event challenging runners to participate in a 33-million mile journey to Mars. The fundraiser asks runners to commit to run an average of 1,000 miles each in 2015. Money raised to benefit the Feed My Starving Children fund. For information, visit facebook.com/moonjoggers.

Dec. 4 – Exeter's 23rd Annual Downtown Christmas Open House – 5-8pm
Downtown Exeter hosts an Old Fashion Christmas as you walk along the downtown streets. The old-fashioned fire truck rides, pictures with Santa and refreshments are featured. For information, call 592-2919.

Dec. 5 – Sales & Tax Breaks for Manufacturers and Farmers – 10am-12pm
The Kings County Farm Bureau, Western United Dairymen and California Automotive Wholesalers Association will a seminar at the Ag Commissioner's Multi-Purpose Room, 680 N. Campus Dr., Hanford. For information or reservations, call 584-3557.

Dec. 5 – Toys for Tots and December Cruise Night – 5-7pm
Rollin Relics Car Club of Porterville will collect Toys at its December Cruise Night. The community is invited to drop off unwrapped toys, for needy children at the Pizza Factory parking lot, corner of Henderson and Porter Road. For information call 288-3824 or 202-7119.

Dec. 5 – Wine & Chocolate Tasting – 6-9pm
This 14th annual event in Downtown Hanford kicks off the Holiday shopping season with selected wines and chocolates, open houses, hors d'oeuvres throughout Main Street. For information, visit mainstreethanford.com.

Dec. 5 – Exeter Christmas Parade – 6:30pm
Downtown Exeter will host "A Magical Wonderland in Lights." For information, call 592-5262.

Dec. 6 – Tinsel Toy 5K & 1 Mile Run Walk
The Visalia Runners and the Tulare Outlet Mall will host the third annual event to benefit the Salvation Army of Tulare's holiday toy drive. Register online at visaliarunners.org.

Dec. 6 – Holiday Book Boutique – 12-5pm
Neighborhood Bookstore will host a book boutique featuring local authors at 4416 W. Damsen Ave., Visalia. For information, call 732-6869.

Dec. 6-7 – George McCann Christmas Spectacular
St. Mary's Parish of Visalia will have a 2-day event featuring a bake sale, a winter wonderland and Christmas tree sale. On Saturday, the event will be open from 1 to 6pm and on Sunday, from 8am to 2pm. Santa Claus will be available for pictures, story time, cookies and hot cocoa. Homemade enchiladas and other baked goods, will be available. For information, call 623-1155.

Dec. 6 – Corcoran Lions Open House – 1-4pm
Corcoran Lions will host a building dedication at 1007 Van Dorsten Ave. Free sopas will be served at 1pm and a 50/50 drawing will follow the dedication ceremonies. For 50/50 tickets, call 816-2397 or 380-7620.

Dec. 6 – Spirit of the Holidays – 4-7pm
Exeter Kiwanis presents "An Old Fashioned Christmas" at the 23rd annual Spirit of the Holidays event at Exeter Veterans Memorial Building, 324 N. Kaweah Hwy. Wines, hors d'oeuvres, raffle, silent auction and Christmas tree auction are featured. Tickets $50. For information, call 592-2919.

Dec. 6 – 1st Saturday in Three Rivers – 9:30am-5pm
In celebration of the Raven Festival, first Saturday will feature special events focusing on the raven. For information, visit www.1stsaturdaytr.com.

Dec. 6 – Lemoore Christmas Parade – 6pm
A Frozen Valley Christmas is the theme for the Christmas Parade in downtown Lemoore on D Street, between Follett and Hill. For information, contact the Lemoore Chamber of Commerce at 924-6401.

Dec. 9 & 16 – Visalia Chamber of Commerce Sign Ordinance Meetings
The City of Visalia is updating its sign ordinance. The Visalia Chamber will host meetings to review the ordinance and receive feedback from business owners and nonprofits regarding improvement. The Visalia Chamber will hold three meetings including Dec. 9 at 7:30am at the Chamber office, 220 N. Santa Fe; and Dec. 17 at 4pm at the Buckman-Mitchell office, 500 N. Santa Fe. The Planning Department will hold meetings Dec. 4 and 18 at 3pm at City Hall East.

Dec. 9 – Women In Business – 11:30am-1:30pm
Exeter Chamber will have a brown bag picnic at the home of Tiffany Nielson. For information, visit exeterchamber.com.

Dec. 9 – TCOE Holiday Social – 2-4pm
The Tulare County Office of Education Instructional Services Division will be hosting the annual Holiday Social at the Doe Avenue Complex. The event will feature a variety of holiday foods and refreshments. To attend, employees should bring a new or gently used coat for donation to the Visalia Rescue Mission. The event will be held in ERS's new Willow Room. For information, call 733-6326.

Dec. 10 – Holiday Luncheon – 11:30-1pm
Lemoore Chamber of Commerce invites members and employees to its annual Holiday luncheon at The Lemoore Train Depot. Games, prizes and holiday music will be featured. Tickets are $15 and available by calling 924-6401.

Dec. 11 & 18 – Christmas Open House – 5-8pm
Experience Exeter's 23rd Annual Downtown Christmas Open House on Thursday nights. Experience this "Old Fashioned" Christmas as you walk along the downtown streets featuring fire truck rides, pictures with Santa and refreshments located in downtown businesses. For information, call 592-2919.

Dec. 11 – 18th Annual Charity Christmas Tree Auction – 6-9pm

EVENT CALENDAR

Hanford Chamber of Commerce presents "An Evening with Santa" at the Hanford Civic Auditorium. Proceeds benefit 10 local charities. The event includes hors d'oeuvers, dinner, music, silent and live auction. Tickets can be purchased by calling 582-0483.

Dec. 12 – Farmer's Fury Toys for Tots Toy Drive

Bring a donation or unwrapped toy to Farmer's Fury Wine Tasting Room in Lemoore and keep your wine glass. For information, visit farmersfurywines.com

Dec. 12 – Citrus Fruit Display and Tasting Event - 9am-12pm
The University of California Lindcove Research and Extension Center is hosting its annual Citrus Fruit Display and Tasting event featuring 100 varieties of citrus grown at Lindcove REC. There will also be a walking tour. For information, visit lrec.ucanr.edu.

Dec. 12 – Kings County Academic Decathlon Sponsorship Deadline
The deadline to submit sponsorship applications for the Kings County Office of Education Academic Decathlon is Dec. 12. Competition dates are Jan. 31 and Feb. 7. For information, call 589-7074.

Dec. 12 - 34th Annual Christmas Tree Auction – 8-11:30pm
Hosted by the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, the Christmas Tree Auction has become a local Holiday tradition. Each year, more than 900 people dress in their finest clothes and kick off the Holiday season with a giving spirit. Order tickets from your favorite participating charity or call the chamber at 734-5876.

Dec. 13 – The Forbidden Toy Drive – 11am-4pm
Forbidden Fantasy presents a toy drive and car show at Lindsay City Park, 911 Parkside Ave. Awards will be given. In addition DJ R20 will perform, taco vendors will be available and a 50/50 raffle will be held. Entry fee is an unwrapped toy or monetary donation.

Dec. 13 – Edwardian Christmas Tea – 12-2pm
The Hanford Carnegie Museum and Hanford Carnegie League will hold high tea featuring a Christmas choir, violinists and dramatic readings from the works of Charles Dickens. Tickets are $25 and available at the museum or by calling 584-1367.

Dec. 13 – Christmas at the Gallery – 4:30pm
The Exeter Courthouse Gallery of the Arts and Museum will hold an art auction, silent auction food, wines and entertainment. Tickets are $40 and available by calling 679-2474.

Dec. 14 – Trek to the Tree – 2:30-3:30pm
The Kings Canyon National Park will host the 89th Trek to the Nation's Christmas Tree ceremony. The event, which is sponsored by the Sanger District Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the National Park Service, will include the Jubilation Singers, Sanger High School Choir, Fresno Tuba Christmas Ensemble, and a non-denominational Holiday message. For information, visit nps.gov/seki/parknews/trektothetree2014.htm.

Dec. 16 – 20th Annual London Christmas Parade – 4pm
Robert Isquierdo, Jr. will be the grand marshal and the Dinuba High Marching Band will perform. The parade will begin at 5766 Ave. 377 and proceed to Kate Road and ending at the London Community Center where all parade participants will congregate for a festival of food, drinks and treats. For information, visit libraryforlondon.com.

Dec. 18 – Visalia Business Academy – 9-10am
The Visalia Business Academy will meet at Brandman University, 659 S. Center Dr. For information, visit visaliachamber.org.

Dec. 18 – Prestige Assisted Living Gala – 5-7:30pm
Raffle prizes, silent auction, light refreshments and beverages and entertainment are featured at the event. Tickets are $20 with proceeds to benefit the Visalia Senior Center. For tickets, call 735-0828.

Dec. 19 – 2014 Lindsay Community Christmas Parade of Lights – 6pm
The Lindsay Community Christmas celebration begins at City Hall with free refreshments and cookies. Santa will arrive at the Lindsay Police Department with free toys for every boy and girl who comes to meet Santa. The parade begins at 6pm at the Save Mart Shopping Center. For information, call 333-1994.

Dec. 20 – Bride Expo Fresno – 11am-4pm
Shop and compare wedding professionals, including event designers, cake bakers, entertainers, invitations and romantic honeymoons. Runway fashion shows are presented at 11am and 2pm. The event will be at the Visalia Fox. For information, visit thegirlnetwork.com.

Dec. 20 – 6th Annual Community Christmas Dinner for Families in Need
Lemoore Senior Center will host a catered meal, professional photo for family pictures, live music, games, entertainment and raffle. To donate, volunteer or for information, call 423-0776.

Dec. 21 – Posada – 1-8pm
The Lindsay Chamber of Commerce and The Spirit and the Bride Kingdom Coalition will present a Posada starting at Lindsay City Hall and followed by free coffee, hot chocolate and cookies at McDermont Field House. For information, call 333-1994.

Dec. 26 - Jan. 5 – Free Sequoia Shuttles
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are offering rides on the Sequoia Shuttle for free in the Giant Forest area of the Sequoia National Parks during the holidays. Shuttles will run every 10 minutes from 10am to 4:30pm. For information, visit nps.gov/seki/parknews/freewintershuttle.htm.

Dec. 31 – New Year's Eve with the Portuguese Kids – 7pm
The Portuguese Kids of Tulare will have a New Year's Eve show with comedy, dinner and dancing. Tickets, $50, include appetizers, dinner, party favors, champagne toast, and sweet bread at midnight. T.D.E.S. Portuguese Hall of Tulare is located at 515 North I St. Tables of 8 and 12 are also available. To purchase tickets or for information, call 901-3472 or 331-1835.

Dec. 31 – New Year's Eve Celebration – 8pm-12am
Visalia's 210 Cafe will be transformed to host a New Year's Eve dinner featuring lobster or prime rib and entertainment. Tickets, $85, available at eventbrite.com.

Dec. 31 – Roaring Into the New Year 2015 – 8pm-1am
Kings Lions will present The Marie Wilson Band at Hanford Civic Auditorium, 400 N. Douty St. Must be 21+ to attend. Tickets are $40 in advance or $45 at the tour. VIP tickets, $250, are available through pre-sale only and include a complementary bottle of champagne and reserved table for 8 people. All tickets include free beer tasting from 8-9pm. For information, visit flavorus.com/kingsNewYear2015.

Jan. 1 – Health Coverage Required
Beginning Jan. 1, all businesses with at least 100 full-time employees must provide health coverage to their employees. For information, visit HealthCare.gov.

Jan 10-11 – Rocky Mountain Gun Show – 9am
The Rocky Mountain Gun Show will be held from 9am to 5pm on Saturday and 9am to 4pm on Sunday at Visalia Convention Center. For information, visit rockymountaingunshow.com.

Jan. 10 – Girl's Day Off Seminar – 11:30am-2pm
This is the first of four seminars to be held in 2015 by Women of the City at The Southern Pacific Depot in Visalia. Living without baggage will be discussed. Tickets, $75, are available on eventbrite.com.

Jan. 13 – 2015 Employment Law and Workplace Safety Compliance Update – 11:30am-2pm
Attorney Brett Sutton of Sutton Hague Law Corporation and James Boretti of Boretti Integrated Safety Solutions will present a conference at Holiday Inn, Visalia. Cost is $35 and includes lunch. For reservations, call 734-5876.

Jan. 14 – Open House for Owens Valley Career Development Center – 10am-3pm
The OVCDC will host an open house at 2370 W. Whittendale Ave., Visalia.

Jan. 14 – Non-Profits Tax Laws – 10am-12pm
How to Comply with Complicated Sales and Use Tax Laws Regarding Non-Profits will be discussed at the Tulare Chamber of Commerce Office, 220 E. Tulare St.

Jan. 16 - COS Giants Baseball Banquet Fundraiser – 5:30pm
Meet the Giants Dinner/Dance and Silent Auction, a fundraiser for the College of Sequoia's Baseball Team, will be held at the Visalia Convention Center. Tickets are $50. For information, visit baseball.cos.edu.

Jan. 20 - KDHCD Service Awards Banquet
Kaweah Delta Health Care District will present its Service Awards Banquet at Visalia Convention Center.

Jan. 21 – 2015 Pistachio Day – 8am-4:30pm
The statewide Pistachio Day conference will be held at the Visalia Convention Center. The event is designed to deliver the latest research-based production practices. Registration is $40 before Jan. 5, $60 after and $80 at the door. For information, visit ucanr.edu/sites/pistachioday.

Jan. 22 – The Great Wine Vs. Beer Showdown – 5:30pm
An evening of wine and beer tasting, appetizers and music will raise funds to support the Farm Bureau. The event will be held at the Hanford Civic Auditorium. Tickets, $50, available at brownpapertickets.com/event/925493.

Jan. 23 – Lemoore Chamber of Commerce Banquet
Lemoore's 2015 outstanding citizen, business and organization of the year will be named at their annual banquet. For information, visit lemoorechamberofcommerce.com.

Jan. 23-25 – The GSSA Championships
The Golden Sate Spirit Association will hold a 2-day competition featuring all divisions for all star cheer, school, rec and dance teams at the Visalia Convention Center. Register online by Dec. 24 at gssaonline.com/champs.

Jan. 24 – 5th Annual Tule Fog 5K/10K Run – 7am
Visalia Parks and Recreation kicks off the New Year with the famous Tule Fog along St. John's River. More than 500 runners compete every year in male and female divisions. Participants who sign up by Jan. 15 are guaranteed a long-sleeved race shirt. Cost to enter is $25/$35 after Jan. 14. For information, visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 29 – Local Motion Awards Luncheon – 11:30am
The Tulare County Association of Governments will hold its 4th Annual Local Motion Awards Luncheon at the Visalia Convention Center. Registration is $35, or $45 after Jan. 4. For information, visit tularecog.org.

Jan. 30 - Rotary Foundation Dinner – 5pm
Rotary District 5230 will hold its "Million Dollar Dinner" at the Visalia Convention Center. Proceeds will benefit The Rotary Foundation. For tickets and information, visit rotary5230.org.

Jan. 31 & Feb. 7 – 2015 Kings County Academic Decathlon – 7:30am
A contest of academic strength among students from Kings County high schools will be held. To volunteer as a judge, call 589-7074.

Jan. 31 - VUSD Winter Formal
The Visalia Unified School District will hold the Winter Formal at the Visalia Convention Center. Tickets can be purchased at each high school's finance office.

Feb. 10 – California Department of Education Conference – 8:45am
The California Department of Education, in partnership with the Tulare County Office of Education, will host a Central California conference entitled Launching the 2014 English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework. For more information, call 651-3831.

Feb. 14 – Prom Throw Back 2015
Kings United Way is offering a "do-over" for your prom. Attendees are encouraged to represent their decade in attire. Tickets are $50 or $100 and include dinner and wine. Proceeds go to benefit the United Way. For information, call 584-1536.

March 7-8 – Tulare Sci-Fi Con
A pop-culture convention that welcomes all genres will be held at the International Agri-Center to benefit the Tulare Library Children's Section. For information, visit tularescificon.org. or facebook.com/tularescificon.

COMMUNITY

Through Dec. 20 – Food For Fines
Tulare Public Library will forgive fines for donated non-perishable food and jackets. All items will be given to Tulare Emergency Aid Council. For information, call 685-4502.

Through December – Tulare Library Special Hours
The Tulare Public Library will have special hours for the Holidays. Passport acceptance hours will end at 4pm and the library will close at 5pm on Dec. 23 and 30. The library will also be closed Dec. 24, 25, 31 and Jan. 1. The library will be open during its regular hours, 10am-7pm, on Dec. 26 and Jan. 2.

Dec. 4 & 18 – eBook Instruction – 5:30-6:30pm
Take advantage of thousands of e-Books by downloading and using the library's Overdrive App. This class teaches you how to access the free books and is offered every other Thursday evening.

Dec. 4 – First Presbyterian Church of Hanford Blood Drive – 4-7pm
The First Presbyterian Church of Hanford will have a blood drive at 340 N. Irwin. Special rewards coupons are given to donors.

Dec. 4 – Cancer is Dinner Talk – 5:30pm
On the first Thursday of each month, Kaweah Delta Health Care District hosts this support group at Sequoia Regional Cancer Center, 4945 W. Cypress Ave. For information, visit Kaweahdelta.org.

Dec. 4 & 18 – Oakland Raiders Boosters Meeting – 7pm
Tulare Kings Counties Oakland Raiders Boosters meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month at Elks Lodge, 3100 W. Main St., Visalia.

Dec. 4 – Visalia Diabetes Support Group – 5:30-7pm
The Kaweah Delta Health Care District support group meets on the first Thursday of each month at Kaweah Delta Multiservice Center, 402 W. Acequia. For information, visit Kaweahdelta.org.

Dec. 5 & 6 – Christmas Yard Sale – 8am-2pm
The Visalia Gleaning Seniors is having its Annual Christmas Yard Sale at 2818 S. West St. (corner of West and Whitendale). Last-minute gifts, decorations and other Christmas items will be available.

Dec. 5 – First Friday with a Physician – 12–1:30pm
On the first Friday of each month, Adventist Medical Center in Hanford hosts a physician seminar series. For information, call 589-2032.

Dec. 6 – JobNow – 8:30am
The Tulare Public Library offers a computer database class once a month. This month features one of the 18 specialized databases available. The instruction will cover the JobNow database where participants can practice career tests and receive live, professional resume advice from home computers.

Dec. 6 – 1st Saturday Books Sale – 10am-2pm
Friends of the Tulare Public Library hold a book sale on the first Saturday of each month. For information, visit tularepubliclibrary.org.

Dec. 6 – Visalia's 10th Annual Holiday Home Tour – 12-5pm
Redwood High School Marching Band and Color Guard will present a home tour, featuring decorations, music, desserts and prizes. A Sleigh Full of Memories will begin at Quail Park, corner of Linwood & Cypress in Visalia. Tickets are $15 in advance or $20 on day of the event. For information, visit redwoodrangerband.org.

Dec. 6 – NaNoWriMo Wrap Up Party – 2-4:30pm
The Visalia Branch of the Tulare County Library is serving as a Come Write In space for National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), offering its meeting room and light refreshments in November. A Thank God It's Over (TGIO) wrap up party will be held in the Visalia Branch Blue Room. For information, please go to nanowrimo.org and tularecountylibrary.org, or call 713-2703.

Dec. 6 – Addressing the Root Cause of Hypothyroidism–10-11:30am
A workshop on Hypothyroidism and Hashimoto's Disease will be held at the Tulare County Office of Education, Alderwood Room, 7000 Doe Ave., Visalia. The workshop is free, but registration is required. To register, visit eventbrite.com/e/addressing-the-root-cause-of-hypothyroidism-and-hashimotos-disease-tcoe-12614-tickets-14624266575?aff=eventful/r/eventful.

Dec. 6 – Vietnam War Veterans Dinner – 6pm
Park Visalia is hosting a special dinner honoring Vietnam War Veterans for their service. This invitation only event will have a Veterans Christmas Tree decorated in red, white and blue. Carol Sweet will be the guest speaker, followed by dinner. For information, call 625-3388.

Dec. 7 – Light Up A Light – 7pm
A memorial celebration hosted by Adventist Health Services will be held at The Old Court House, 113 Court St. For information, call 537-2860.

Dec. 8 – Mental Health First Aid – 8am-5pm
An 8-hour course that helps the public identify, understand and respond to the signs of mental illnesses will be taught at Cafe 210 in Visalia. Upon completion, participants will be Mental Health First Aid Certificated. The event is sold out. For information about future events, visit mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

Dec. 9 – Yappy Hour – 5-9pm
Yappy Hour is on the second Tuesday at The Planning Mill Artisan Pizzeria, 514 E. Main Street. A donation from all proceeds benefit the Valley Oak SPCA. Well-behaved, leashed pets are welcome on the patio.

Dec. 9 – Exeter Friends of the Library – 7pm
The Exeter Friends of the Library meets on the second Tuesday each month at the Exeter Branch Library, 230 E. Chestnut. For information, visit exeterfriends.weebly.com.

Dec. 10 & 17 – Medicare Extra Help – 1-4pm
Every Wednesday, Tulare Senior Center offers free counseling for Medicare beneficiaries. Help with prescription plans, claims, appeals and general information. This program is sponsored by Kings/Tulare AAA HICAP. Appointments available by calling 623-0199.

Dec. 10 – The Knitting Club – 5:30pm
The Tulare Public Library knitting club meets every other Wednesday in the Olympic Room.

Dec. 10 – Mt. Whitney High School Blood Drive – 8am-12pm
A Central Valley Blood Drive will be held at Mt. Whitney High, 900 South Conyer St., Visalia. Donors will receive a free t-shirt. For information, email dsilvera@donateblood.org.

Dec. 10 – Friends of the Library Annual Winter Book Sale – 2-7pm
Friends of the Hanford Library will sell new and used books, CDs and DVDs at the Hanford Branch Library, 401 N. Douty. For information, call 582-0261.

Dec. 11 – Woman's Club Christmas Home Tour – 4:30-8pm
Exeter Woman's Club hosts tours of local homes with Holiday decorations, live music, hot cocoa and snacks. Tickets, $15 in advance or $20 on the day of the tour, are available at Exeter Chamber of Commerce. For information, call 592-6738. To view previous year's homes visit exeterwomansclub.com.

Dec. 11 – Milan Institute Blood Drive – 8am-12pm
The Milan Institute, 6500 S. Mooney Blvd., will have a blood drive. All donors receive a free t-shirt.

Dec. 11 – UPS Visalia Blood Drive – 5-8pm
Visalia's United Parcel Service will have a blood drive at 7401 W. Sunnyview. All donors will receive a free travel mug.

Dec. 11 – Tree of Remembrance Service – 6:15pm
People's Funeral Chapel will commemorate lost loved ones at a special service featuring a brief message and a remembrance video. To make reservations or to have your loved one remembered, submit a photograph to angelica.Vargas@dignitymemorial.com or at the chapel, 501 N. Douty St., Hanford.

Dec. 12 – Sweets For Seniors – 8am
Jamison High School, American Legion Post 100 and the Lemoore Recreation Department will host a free event for seniors at the Civic Auditorium, 435 C. Street. A free gift for all seniors, desserts prepared by West Hills College, Christmas music and skits performed by Jamison High School Students will be featured. For reservations, call 924-6767.

Dec. 12 & Dec. 19 – Intro to Word – 8:30am
The Tulare Public Library will offer Intro to Word Part 1 on Dec. 12 and Part 2 on Dec. 19.

Dec. 12-13 – The Road to Christmas
A Christmas festival with live music, food, interactive activities will begin at The Road Church, 1021 S. Burke St., Visalia at 6:15pm and on Dec. 13 at 4pm. Adult tickets are $10 and children $5 dollars and are available at the Road Church and at theroadvisalia.com.

Dec. 12, 13 & 14 – Souled Out for Kids Christmas Program
Tulare Community Church, New Life Community Church and Sunrise Community Church are partnering to put on a Christmas Program to benefit Souled Out for Kids. The event is an evening of music, drama and dance. Souled out for Kids is a program where all of the students in a selected school are presented with a brand new pair of shoes. On Dec. 12 at 7pm, the program will be held at Tulare Community Church, 1820 N. Gem Street. On Dec. 13 at 6pm, the program will be held at Sunrise Community Church, 6-8pm 100 E. Inyo Ave., and on Dec. 14 at 4pm the program will be held at New Life Community Church, 1820 N. Gem St. For tickets, visit facebook.com/tularecommunitychurch.

Dec. 12 – Kaweah Delta health Care District Blood Drive – 10am-3pm
A blood drive will be held at Kaweah Delta Hospital, 400 W. Mineral King, Visalia. Special reward coupons will be given to all donors.

Dec. 12 – Graphic Novel Club – 4-5pm
The Graphic Novel Club will meet at the Tulare Public Library in the Olympic Room. The group meets on the second Friday of each month. For information, call 685-4500.

Dec. 13 – Walk with a Doc – 8-9am
Healthy Visalia Committee holds its "Just Walk" program at Riverway Sports Park, 3611 N. Dinuba Blvd. The free program requires no pre-registration. During the walk, a healthy topic is presented and snacks are provided. For information, visit walkwithadoc.org.

Dec. 13 – Second Saturday Book Club – 11am – noon
The club will discuss various banned books in celebration of banned book month. The club meets in the Charter Room of the Tulare Public Library, 475 North M St. To register for book clubs, call 685-4503 or stop by the research and information desk.

Dec. 14 – Second Sunday Seminars – 2-3pm
The Sarah Mooney Museum features seminars on the second Sunday every month. The programs focus on specific elements of turn-of-the-century life in the Lemoore/Kings County area. The museum, located at 542 W. D Street in Lemoore, is open every Sunday afternoon from 12-3pm for docent-led tours and special activities. For information, visit sarahamooneymuseum.com.

Dec. 15 – Evolutions Fitness & Rehabilitation Center Blood Drive – 4-7pm
A blood drive will be held at Evolutions Fitness at 1425 E. Prosperity Ave., Tulare. Special reward coupons will be given to all donors.

Dec. 17 – Spanish Computer Class – 9am
The Tulare Public Library will offer a computer class in Spanish.

Dec. 17 – Spinal Cord Injury Support Group – 6:30-7:30pm
The Spinal Cord Injury Support Group meets on the third Wednesday of each month at Kaweah Delta Rehabilitation Hospital, 840 S. Akers St. For information, visit KaweahDelta.org.

THEATER

Dec. 4-14 – Pedro, the Angel of Olivera Street
The Enchanted Playhouse presents the story of Pedro, a young boy with the voice of an angel who wishes to restore traditional Christmas celebrations. The play will be held on Friday and Saturday at 7pm, and Sunday at 2pm at Main Street Theatre, 307 E. Main, Visalia. Tickets are $8 and $5 for matinees. For information, visit enchantedplayhouse.org.

Dec. 6-7, 12-14 – Kings Players - A Redneck Christmas Carol
The Kings Players present "A Redneck Christmas Carol" at the Temple Theater, 514 Visalia St., Hanford. For information, call 584-7241.

Dec. 10 – Holiday Inn Movie – 2-4pm
The Tulare Public Library will show the 1942 film "Holiday Inn" in the Council Chambers.

Dec. 12 – Guardians of the Galaxy – 5-7pm
The Tulare Public Library will show Guardian's of the Galaxy in the Council Chambers.

Dec. 13 – Jingle Ball – 7:30pm
The Lindsay Community Theater, 190 N. Elmwood Ave., presents Jingle Ball, a holiday variety show with local talent. For information, call 562-1659 or visit lindsaycommunitytheater.com

Dec. 23 – Disney's A Christmas Carol – 2-4pm
The Tulare Public Library will show the 2009 film "Disney's A Christmas Carol" in the Council Chambers.

January

Jan. 9-25 – The 39 Steps – 7:30pm
Visalia Players Theater Company presents "The 39 Steps," a fast-paced whodunit at the Ice House Theater, 410 E Race Ave., Visalia. Matinees will be held at 2pm Jan. 11, 18 & 25. Evening performances will be Jan. 9, 10, 16, 17, 23 & 24 at 7:30pm. For tickets and information, visit visaliaplayers.org.

January 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 & 31 – Lilies in the Field – 7:30pm
The Barn Theater in Porterville presents "Lilies of the Field," the story of a group of Catholic nuns who escape from the Communist held portion of Berlin and come to the United States. For information, visit barntheater.porterville.com.

Jan. 21-Jan. 24 – Guys & Dolls
El Diamante High School will perform the classic "Guys and Dolls" musical. For info, visit www.vusd.org/MtWhitney.cfm.

Sports

COS Men's Basketball Off to a Slow Start

Stefan Barros

The College of the Sequoias Men's Basketball team came into this new season with high expectations. The Giants were returning three starters from a team that finished second in the Central Valley Conference with a 10-2 record, and won its final regular season games.

But the start of the season hasn't been what 14-year head coach Rusty Smith expected. With a 3-6 record through three tournaments and a home game this year, Smith knows they have to play better. "We haven't played consistently well, and it has been disappointing in performance and in record," he said.

Even with the slow start, Smith still believes his team can reach its goal of winning the league and going the playoffs. "We still want to win a championship. I still think they can. We started off slow last year. I just hope they don't wait until league again this year."

Coach Rusty Smith

One of the reasons for the high expectations was that there were three talented returners to this team, this year, and they are also returning starters from last year's team. One of those, Chris Ross, a Bakersfield native, has been showing some of the first-year players the ropes. He tries to get freshmen accustomed to playing at the college level.

Ross explained his leadership role, "I want to show them how Coach Smith likes to run things. Also these guys are very coachable and wanting to learn."

Ross shared the same disappointment as Smith when asked about the start of their season, but Ross also harked back to how last year's team fared after a similar start, "We started off slow last season, but we began to build more chemistry as the season went on." Still, he is optimistic that the Giants can win their league and secure a playoff berth.

Smith believes that his team can play much better, but also notes that they have played a very tough schedule, and have held several second half leads that have ended in losses. "We need to play harder and smarter for 40 minutes. We've had leads in the second half and haven't finished."

To be able to play consistently for a full 40-minute game, Smith knows he'll need some production from his freshmen coming off the bench and stronger perimeter shooting. These he sees as two of his teams' weaknesses right now.

"None of our freshmen have really stood out," Smith elaborated. "So far they haven't performed to their abilities. As a team they haven't played to their capabilities. Perimeter shooting has been suspect so far."

Another of the three returning starters--forward Brantley Bynum, an El Diamante graduate and team captain--talking about being a leader to the younger guys, understands how tough it is play at the JC level, "We're a young team, these guys are trying to learn on the fly."

When asked if the season would be a failure if the playoffs were not reached, Ross took a different tack. "It would be more of a disappointment if we didn't make the playoffs, it wouldn't be a failure."

With the weight of carrying the freshmen this year, one wonders if the returners were putting a little too much pressure on themselves in the first few tournaments. Smith doesn't see that as a reason for the slow start. "I don't think they're doing that, they still have good numbers, it's a team game."

Smith sees the experience of the three returning starters as a strength for this team. That was a big reason why the expectations are so high this season.

Smith emphasized the importance of experience with this group. "Anytime you have experienced players, expectations rise and they have to perform at a high level. At the JC level, experience is always important, but we need others to step up as well."

As far as weaknesses are concerned, Smith sees a few that could be responsible for the team's slow start thus far. "I see depth as a weakness, but not the biggest weakness. We need the whole team to step up."

The team's spirit, in spite of the slow start, is still upbeat. It's a team with a good ethic, and with "a will to get better," according to Ross.

The Giants will have an extended break from game play, traveling on December 12 to play in the Foothill Tournament vs. Canada College. They won't play their next home game until December 19, when they will host the Mannon/Pepsi/Holiday Inn Tournament.

V-Town

Continued from p. 17

The time commitment for being part of a roller derby team is large. The V-Town practices are approximately two hours, sometimes longer, during times when Roller Towne is not open to the public. The teams have traveled up and down the state, to Nevada, and even to Hawaii for games, also called bouts.

And, it takes a long time to wind-down from games and practices, said Melissa Hawkins, 35, who has been part of the team for four years.

Hawkins admits that roller derby can be a rough sport. She has suffered a broken ankle, dislocated shoulder and has lost a tooth. After breaking her wrist, she and her husband decided to get accident insurance for their family, including their six-year-old daughter who is on the junior team for 5-17 years of ag

"It's still worth it," she said. "I love the challenge and I have made some really amazing friends."

V Town Derby Dames was formed in 2007. It is a member of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, which is the largest governing body of roller derby, said Liz Lawson, 36, team captain and a founding member of V Town.

Until now, V Town has been in the apprentice league. Members are hoping for advancement into the regular league for 2015. This would bring the team into a rating system and would mean new teams to play.

V Town has two teams, the Dames, which is the primary team, and the Darlings, which is something like a junior varsity in football. While there are approximately 50 members in the club, only 14 are on the roster in any given game. Of those, five are on the track at one time, four blockers and one jammer.

Laura Anderson, Amanda Silva, and Amber Anderson of the V Town Darlings battle the Faultline Derby Devils of Hollister during an away game earlier this year. Photo by David Costa.

V Town Darlings Sarah Gasca and Christina Chandler lock in their opponent during a recent game with the Pacific Coast Recycled Rollers. Photo by David Costa.

The jammer is designated by wearing a vest. The game is divided into jams, which can last up to two minutes. The object is to block the other team's jammer and to allow your team jammer to advance or move forward from the pack.

"You have to play defense and offense at the same time," Lawson said.

The team practices year-round, although the playing season is from February through November. There are about five home games each year at Roller Towne.

While the V Town players are all female, there are male coaches and referees. There are male roller derby teams in other locations of the country, but not in the Central Valley. The junior team of 5 to 17-year olds has both girls and boys, however.

V Town is a non-profit club. Every home game has a non-profit partner, which generally helps with advertising. During the game, a raffle is held with proceeds going to the non-profit partner. It generally generates about $600. Some partners have included the Visalia Rescue Mission, suicide prevention and veterans' groups.

Locally, there is also a club in Kings County, the Kings County Derby Queens, which formed in 2011. These ladies practice two nights a week at the Lemoore Parks and Recreation Center.

Both clubs are continually in need of sponsors and hold various fundraisers throughout the year. While team members purchase their own gear and bear most of their travel expenses, the club will pay for overnight stays when needed for away games and pays for all of the expenses for home games, as well as rink rentals for practices and more.

For more information for the V Town Dames and Darlings call Melissa Hawkins at 901-0034. For more information for the Kings County Derby Queens, call 343-3729.

Health

'Tis the Season to Indulge in Walnuts

Staff Reports

Researchers at UC Davis and other institutions have found that diets rich in whole walnuts or walnut oil slowed prostate cancer growth in mice. In addition, both walnuts and walnut oil reduced cholesterol and increased insulin sensitivity. The walnut diet also reduced levels of the hormone IGF-1, which had been previously implicated in both prostate and breast cancer. The study was published online in the *Journal of Medicinal Food*.

"For years, the United States government has been on a crusade against fat, and I think it's been to our detriment," said lead scientist and research nutritionist Paul Davis. "Walnuts are a perfect example. While they are high in fat, their fat does not drive prostate cancer growth. In fact, walnuts do just the opposite when fed to mice."

Davis and colleagues have been investigating the impact of walnuts on health for some time. A previous study found that walnuts reduced prostate tumor size in mice; however, there were questions about which parts of the nuts generated these benefits. Was it the meat, the oil or the omega-3 fatty acids? If it was the omega-3 fats, the benefit might not be unique to walnuts. Since the fatty acid profile for the soybean oil used as a control was similar, but not identical, to walnuts, more work had to be done.

In the current study, researchers used a mixture of fats with virtually the same fatty acid content as walnuts as their control diet. The mice were fed whole walnuts, walnut oil or the walnut-like fat for 18 weeks. The results replicated those from the previous study. While the walnuts and walnut oil reduced cholesterol and slowed prostate cancer growth, in contrast, the walnut-like fat did not have these effects, confirming that other nut components caused the improvements – not the omega-3s.

"We showed that it's not the omega-3s by themselves, though, it could be a combination of the omega-3s with whatever else is in the walnut oil," Davis said. "It's becoming increasingly clear in nutrition that it's never going to be just one thing; it's always a combination."

While the study does not pinpoint which combination of compounds in walnuts slows cancer growth, it did rule out fiber, zinc, magnesium and selenium. In addition, the research demonstrated that walnuts modulate several mechanisms associated with cancer growth.

"The energy effects from decreasing IGF-1 seem to muck up the works so the cancer can't grow as fast as it normally would," Davis said. "Also, reducing cholesterol means cancer cells may not get enough of it to allow these cells to grow quickly."

In addition, the research showed increases in both adiponectin and the tumor suppressor PSP94, as well as reduced levels of COX-2, all markers for reduced prostate cancer risk.

Although results in mice don't always translate to humans, Davis said his results suggest the benefits of incorporating walnuts into a healthy diet. Other research, such as the PREDIMED human study, which assessed the Mediterranean diet, also found that eating walnuts reduced cancer mortality. Still, Davis recommends caution in diet modification.

"In our study, the mice were eating the equivalent of 2.6 ounces of walnuts," he said. "You need to realize that 2.6 ounces of walnuts is about 482 calories. That's not insignificant, but it's better than eating a serving of supersized fries, which has 610 calories. In addition to the cancer benefit, we think you also get cardiovascular benefits that other walnut research has demonstrated.

"It's the holiday season, and walnuts are part of any number of holiday dishes. Feel free to consume them in moderation."

Other researchers included Hyunsook Kim, Department of Physiology, College of Veterinary Medicine, Konkuk University; and Wallace Yokoyama, Processed Foods Research, Western Regional Research Center. This study was funded by American Institute for Cancer Research, the California Walnut Board and the KU-Research Professor Program of Konkuk University.

UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center is the only National Cancer Institute-designated center serving the Central Valley and inland Northern California, a region of more than six million people. Its specialists provide compassionate, comprehensive care for more than 10,000 adults and children every year, and access to more than 150 clinical trials at any given time. Its innovative research program engages more than 280 scientists at UC Davis, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Jackson Laboratory, whose scientific partnerships advance discovery of new tools to diagnose and treat cancer.

Through the Cancer Care Network, UC Davis collaborates with a number of hospitals and clinical centers throughout the region to offer the latest cancer care. Its community-based outreach and education programs address disparities in cancer outcomes across diverse populations. For more information, visit http://cancer.ucdavis.edu.

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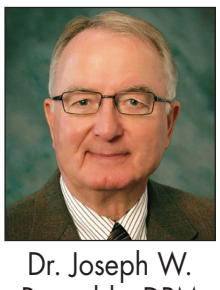

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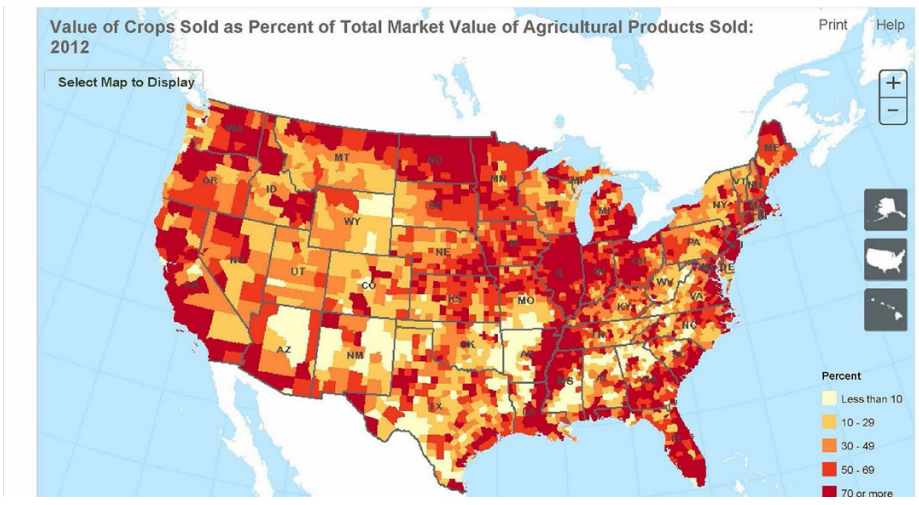

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) now offers the Ag Census Web Maps application, a dynamic online tool that gives users rapid access to Census of Agriculture maps and data about crops and plants, livestock and animals, economics, farms and operators in more than 3,000 counties across the United States.

New Web Tool Allows Users to Visualize, Analyze Agriculture Data

Staff Reports

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"The Ag Census Web Maps give farmers, ranchers, researchers, planners, non-profits and industry easy access to important data that impact nearly every aspect of agriculture," said NASS Administrator Joseph T. Reilly.

The Ag Census Web Maps application is interactive. Users can navigate to an area of interest, print the map, display and extract a county's data, download maps and accompanying data for use with common software programs, and integrate the web map services with other mapping applications to visualize and analyze 2012 Census of Agriculture data in a geospatial context. NASS developed the application in collaboration with USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS).

The Census of Agriculture provides a detailed picture every five years of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. It is the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every state and county in the United States. Census data are used to make decisions about many things that directly impact farmers and ranchers, including community planning, store/company locations, availability of operational loans and other funding, location and staffing of service centers, and farm programs and policies.

"The Ag Census Web Maps application is one tool in USDA's shed to better serve rural America, the nation, and future generations," said Reilly. "As we pursue innovation at home and abroad, we are considering how advances in technology and knowledge management systems can help users access the information they need to better accomplish their goals. We believe the Ag Census Web Maps application will help users of our data do just that."

The application includes county-level maps and statistics in five broad categories: crops and plants, economics, farms, livestock and animals, and operators. Information about harvested acreage, agricultural sales, enrollment in crop insurance programs, natural resources use, statistics on cattle, demographics about farmers and ranchers, and much more can be visualized and analyzed using the Ag Census Web Maps application.

Anyone can access and use the Ag Census Web Maps data. An application programming interface (API) is also available for developers. The application is available at: www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Ag_Census_Web_Maps/Overview

Lindcove Center to Host Annual Citrus Fruit Display Day

Visitors can sample more than 100 varieties of citrus.

On Friday, December 12, UC's Lindcove Research & Extension Center will host its annual Citrus Fruit Display Day and Tasting Event, where visitors can sample the more than 100 citrus varieties grown at Lindcove, and participate in a sensory taste test conducted by Cooperative Extension horticulturist Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia and Dr. Dave Obenland.

Those in attendance can discuss new low-seeded citrus varieties with Dr. Mikeal Roose and ask UC advisors Craig Kallsen and Neil O'Connell their citrus questions. In addition to taste testing fruit, there will be a walking tour at 10am, starting with a presentation the Citrus Clonal Protection Program by Dr. Georgios Vidalakis.

The event is scheduled from 9am to noon. The center is located at 22963 Carson Ave., Exeter.

For more information, contact Anita Hunt at 592-2408 or amdhunt@ucanr.edu or visit http://lrec.ucanr.edu.

UC's Lindcove Research Center hosts its Display Day annually. Photo courtesy UC's Lindcove Research Center.

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